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Sheridan to Robertson

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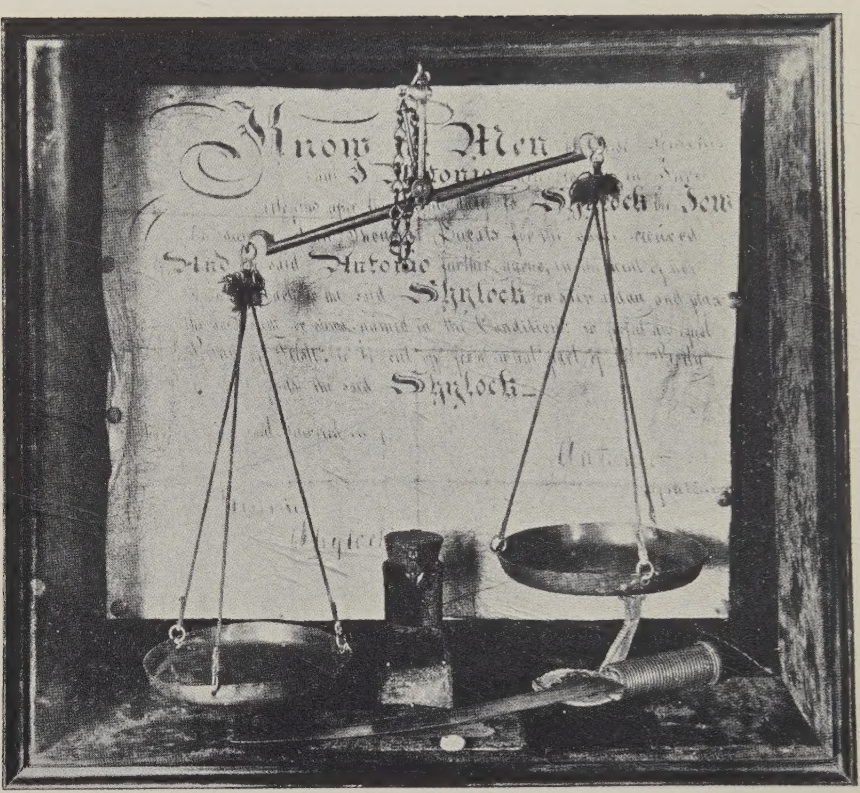

Scales, Knife, and Bond used by Edmund Kean as Shylock
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Sheridan to Robertson

A Study of the Nineteenth-Century London Stage

BY

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BENJAMIN BLOM, INC.
NEW YORK

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First published 1926, Harvard University Press.
Reprinted 1963, by arrangement with the Harvard University Press.
Published by Benjamin Blom, Inc., New York 52.
L. C. Catalog Card No.: 63-23191

Printed in U.S.A. by
NOBLE OFFSET PRINTERS, INC.
NEW YORK 3, N. Y.

DEDICATED TO MY UNCLE

EDWARD F. OSBORN

A wise and kind man

Preface

THE recent appearance of Professor Thaler's *Shakspere to Sheridan* has encouraged me to publish at this time a manuscript that has been laid aside for more than ten years. Partly because of the newly awakened interest in stagecraft aroused by such books as William Archer's *The Old Drama and the New* and Professor Odell's *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, I now venture to put before students of the drama a revision of this study of the early nineteenth-century stage. I realize that it can depend for a hearing upon no general interest in the dramatic literature of this period. On the side of stagecraft, however, it draws upon matter perhaps as interesting as can be found in any epoch of dramatic history.

To most students of literature the English drama of the early nineteenth century is an enigma. They either shun it altogether or dismiss it with an apology — what apology is largely a matter of chance. Absence of dramatic talent in authors, vulgarity in audiences, and the greater attractiveness of poetry and the novel, are some of the catch phrases used by writers who mention this painful subject.

Such generalizations, even when true, have but little value, for some or all of them have been current with critics in all periods of drama, not excepting the Elizabethan.

The present study is a protest against this manner of disposing of the nineteenth-century drama. It is the result of much delving among dusty volumes, pamphlets, and playbills, many of which have been inspected by no one but their collectors. Instead of the dull and unprofitable task that some might imagine it, my work has given me pleasure, which I now hope in some measure to communicate to fellow students of the stage.

My approach, then, is that of one who has tried to find in the endless first-hand material available on this subject what may be of value to students of dramatic literature. In no sense, however, is this a study of the dramatic literature of the period. Such a study would require a far more pretentious effort than I have made. It would involve a thorough investigation of the development of modern dramatic technique. My work is rather a preface to such an attempt. It assumes that no study of the literature of the period can be made either accurate or illuminating until the trend of the corresponding stagecraft is clearly understood. During these years the written drama was not only influenced by the mode of presentation, but was entirely dependent upon it. Aside from an attempt to make clear in a general way the relationship between the written and the spoken drama, I shall not at any time assume the rôle of dramatic critic, biographer, or literary historian.

On the other hand, I do not intend this volume to serve as a reference book for the theatrical enthusiast. It presents no complete lists of names, dates, plays, or dramatic events. Although it has, I hope, much fresh matter of encyclopædic interest, to stress this is not my purpose, which is rather to inspect afresh the separate significant facts — however well or however slightly known — and so determine *their relation to the trend of stage history*. The elements of stagecraft, however unpretentious, I regard as having an influence upon the progress of dramatic art, and as uniting in a vital and all-important *stream of dramatic life*. Stagecraft, then, regarded as vitally and organically related to, and not merely coincident with, written drama, will be our chief concern. The expression medium of drama is capable of a more tyrannical control of the written drama than corresponding media can have of other literary forms. Believing that this field of study deserves more attention than has generally been given it, I have made the present attempt to picture the stage from which our own drama has derived. Others I hope will go further, for in no respect is my work complete.

Much valuable material is already available on aspects of the general field.[1] No one book, however, makes accessible to the student of literature results which bear clearly on the literary problems involved, and none makes a very serious effort to present the stage history itself as a whole. To determine such historical values one must do more than review and condemn. The dramatic art of this period, if not the expression of great literary vitality, deserves none the less to be studied in all its aspects as a most significant phenomenon in dramatic evolution. As such we shall approach it. Since we are to deal with what are perhaps rightly regarded as dramatic evils, let us go to their roots. No fact should be disregarded merely because it is contemptible. Although the stage in our period had its great and unforgettable moments, it had far more that now seem "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable." The great tragedians, whose names still dazzle us as their magnificent rant enthralled their worshippers of past centuries, can no longer be regarded as the true interpreters of the spirit of their age. If we would know that spirit as it manifested itself in drama, we must prepare to rub shoulders with scene-shifters and clowns as well as with playwrights and tragedians. All competed on an equal footing before an audience which in the same evening could be moved to wild enthusiasm by the highest flights of Shakespeare's fancy and to still more enthusiasm by a melodramatic spectacle with nothing better to commend it than a waterfall.

Augustin Filon in *Le Théâtre Anglais* rightly insists that, even if a distinctively English modern drama did not exist, "il y aurait encore là un phénomène curieux à étudier, un problème intéressant à résoudre . . . pour la critique comme pour tout autre science, la plus féconde des leçons, le plus étrangement suggestif de tous les spectacles."

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[1] See *Bibliographical Note*, Appendix III.

In the void, or chaos, of Georgian and early Victorian drama we indeed approach a fascinating problem, one of the most pregnant of literary lessons, and one of the most suggestive of spectacles. We are to watch the young British democracy of those years attempting to find a satisfying amusement at the theatres. Again to quote Filon: "C'est de l'histoire littéraire, mais c'est aussi de l'histoire sociale: les deux se tiennent, et, désormais, ne sont plus séparable."

We shall, therefore, watch the stage as far as possible through the eyes of that public and not through our own. We shall become familiar with its inclinations and aversions, and perhaps discover why, as a result of them, some forms of dramatic art were developed instead of others which the contemporary critics often thought were wrongly neglected. The most informing result of our study will be to note that what the public in the main preferred had in it the principle of dramatic progress, making for vitality and originality as against the bondage of imitation and affectation that for centuries had prevailed.

For the completeness or accuracy of my work I make no claims. At best it must be fragmentary. If the period is poor in dramatic literature, it is rich in journalistic commentary and the records of stage events. Few facts in any way essential to our study are not available. Merely to inspect them would be the work of more than a lifetime. I cannot profess to have done even this. I have tried to read discriminatingly and to become familiar with a sufficiently large amount of representative material to render my conclusions — reached after and not before my study — of some value as guides to others. There are still many uncorrected oversights and errors, I fear, for I have invariably found myself obliged to change first impressions as I read further; for even where so much information is at hand I have learned to be wary in drawing conclusions as to both matters of theory and matters of fact. I have often wondered how much of our assumptions based upon the scant survival of data from earlier periods can in any way be depended upon. The most I can hope for my work is that it may increase somewhat the interest in this newer aspect of dramatic study, and that it may serve as a reliable, although incomplete, chart of these unfamiliar waters.

Let me take this occasion to express my gratitude to Professor George P. Baker, at whose suggestion this study was undertaken, and for whose criticism and advice I am much indebted. I want also to express my thanks to Professor George Lyman Kittredge for his invaluable advice in the choice of illustrations and to Professor David Lambuth for his painstaking criticism of the text. The illustrations are from the Theatre Collection in the Harvard College Library, copied with the kind consent of the curator, Mr. Robert Gould Shaw.

E. Bradlee Watson

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Foreword

KNOWLEDGE of English drama from 1800 to 1900 has been much like our knowledge of central Africa in the seventies of the nineteenth century. Then maps showed the coasts of Africa well charted, but an interior conjectural or wholly unguessed. Livingstone and his predecessors had told us something of that vague interior, but it remained for Stanley to bring about a definite mapping. Similarly, we have accurate knowledge of English drama preceding that of the nineteenth century, — that is, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,— and also, at the other extreme, since 1870. In parts of the less charted region there has been some thorough work done by doctoral theses, but these, filed in special college libraries, have been inaccessible to the general public. Of course, we have had biographies of actors and actresses living before 1870, but a harsh fate has seemed to govern the writing: nearly all are anecdotal, scrappy, concerned so much with the individual that his art, in relation to the drama of his time or the general life of his day, is hardly considered at all. There have even been some attempts at histories of the stage or of the drama from 1800 to 1870, but they have not been carefully documented, nor have they shown any broad treatment of their subjects. In brief, what has been published in this period has simply made us keenly aware of the need for well-documented, broadly considered biographies; carefully verified histories of stage and drama; and even thorough special studies of subdivisions of the field, of the influences from the earlier centuries distinctly English, or — foreign influences of any kind or time.

Such a study of the English stage from 1800 to 1870 Dr. Watson has here attempted. Naturally, in the space at his command for a subject so large and so crowded with detail, he only hopes to break the way. Taking the statement,— often repeated, suspected by more than one careful student of the period, but little tested,— that greatly changed conditions in stage and drama appeared suddenly with Tom Robertson in the sixties, Dr. Watson has scrutinized it in the light of all available evidence from the preceding years of the century. He proves clearly that, as with nearly all other supposed artistic cataclysms, there was really a slow, steady developing of forces which one man — in this case Tom Robertson — brought to particular effectiveness. In this examination he has rested not simply on study of theatres, actors, plays, current criticism by the press, but on what we are beginning to understand is the unknown factor, X, in the success or failure of a play — its production as a whole, and the producer behind that. Could we write a documented history of play-production from Shakspere's time to the present day, it would be not only surprisingly illuminating, but also probably subversive of many current ideas as to the drama of the different periods. Such a history of play-production even with the evidence at our command in such detailed volumes as those of the "Elizabethan Drama" of E. K. Chambers, we can hardly write for the seventeenth century. With difficulty can we write it for the earlier years of the eighteenth century; but with the letters, press comment, printed lives of the actors and actresses available for the second half of that century and for the nineteenth century, something like an adequate idea of methods of producing plays becomes possible. More than any other book I know, this of Dr. Watson's treats plays and their production in their right relationship — as inseparable. He does not merely gather facts as to the mechanics of the stage of 1800 to 1870, its actors, managers, scenery and lighting; through these he explains the development of the drama itself.

In Dr. Watson's examination of what actors, managers, scenery, lighting, press criticism offer him, he makes clear many places that have been dark. Macready, and especially Mme. Vestris, assume new significance. Well known as actors, they become very significant as play-producers, not merely of English classics, but of plays showing tendencies of the day.

Such a book as this, emphasizing in this unusual way the complementary nature of all the arts of the theatre, breaks a fresh road. It will cause discussion as to method and details. Some of its conclusions may be challenged. Basally, however, its method is sound. Moreover, this matter is sure to have a very desirable result. Out of the discussion and the challenging will result a complete and satisfactory presentation of this period heretofore left vague and conjectural.

George Pierce Baker

Sheridan to Robertson

Chapter I

LONDON LIFE AND THE STAGE

THE London of to-day regards the London of yesterday much as a man thinks back upon his schooldays: the early century was a period of awkwardness, growing pains, and callow sentimentality. A modern Londoner, if he deigns to use the expression "early Victorian," invariably pronounces it with a tone of contempt. The insinuation is not altogether just, for in this case, if ever, the child was father of the man. Growth was the great fact of the age: the growing pains might well be excused.

From a population in 1800 of slightly over a million, London at the beginning of Victoria's reign had increased to almost two million inhabitants, occupying more than two hundred thousand houses, and attending more than two hundred churches and as many more "dissenting places of worship."[1] By 1854 official count placed the figures at 2,831,950 people and 382,949 houses, and ten years later at 3,316,932 people and 445,787 houses.[2] Roughly speaking, the number of theatres kept pace with the increase of the city. In 1807 there were ten theatres giving performances during the winter, and one open only in the summer. In 1861 there were twenty-two theatres, all successfully in operation.[3] In 1870 there were thirty.

These figures, however, do not in the least represent the increase in the representation of drama. Of the ten theatres in 1807, only two during the winter might present the spoken drama, whereas in 1861 all of the twenty-two theatres might, and indeed more than half of them did, present such plays as in the early century were allowed only upon the stages of the two patent houses, Drury Lane and Covent Garden.

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[1] T. G. Tomlins, *Brief View of the English Drama*, 1840, p. 57.

[2] Report of the Post-Master General, 1864.

[3] *Theatrical Journal*, Jan. 9, 1861. See table, p. 58.

Another fact of importance is that from 1845 to 1866 no theatres were built, whereas before and after those dates theatre-building was very frequent. This period of inactivity was in a large measure due to the readjustment from monopoly conditions to those of the free stage, but it also points, I believe, to a relationship between the economic life of the city and the drama, as a result of which the theatres were victimized by external influences quite beyond their control. This seems the more likely because the greater part of the audiences of these years came from the middle and lower classes, rather than from the plutocracy and aristocracy, that patronized the theatres only after 1870. I shall have more to say on this subject in later chapters, but for the present we may note that not until the end of our period did the economic life of the city seem to favor dramatic art. In 1870 a wholly new prosperity had visited the workers for the stage, making the returns of the early century seem penurious, and the lot of managers in that period no less than tragic.[1]

The fault, perhaps, lay in part with the entertainment offered the public; but it is probable that, if we could bring the economic problems of the century into their right relation to the theatres, we should find that a period of general depression and hard times, following upon the wars and resulting from bad governmental regulation, was to a large extent responsible for the decline of dramatic art.

It was an outstanding fact of the period that gradually the theatres rose to a prosperous position in the economic life of the city. From the most unfavorable condition of dependence and failure in 1833 they had by 1870 become free and self-supporting, and they had begun to repay amply those who wrote and acted. The theatres had learned to appeal to their public, and that public was able to pay for its entertainment in the theatres.

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[1] Cf. *The Bancrofts*, p. 72 (ed. of 1909).

Of the nation's political life almost nothing is traceable in the drama. The theatres existed solely by the grace of the king and his chamberlain; therefore nothing but the most slavish deference was tolerated on the stage. A perfunctory yearly visit by royalty to each major theatre, and a few historical and regal pageants, given especially on the occasion of coronations, were about the only interchange of courtesy, except, of course, the ostentatious singing of the national hymn "by the entire company," which was a feature of each performance, and which now survives in the single musical phrase played hurriedly at the fall of the curtain in all London theatres. Until the reign of Victoria, royalty took little or no notice of the drama, and at no time was the stage allowed to mirror the actions of the government. Bulwer-Lytton, in the preface to the 1841 edition of his plays, pitied himself because he had to conduct a play through the period following the French Revolution, without being political or talking of starting a republic.

Patriotism in the theatre took the form of chauvinistic ridicule of foreigners. The French, the Germans, and the Yankees were all burlesqued; but the French enjoyed by far the greatest amount of attention. In one of the earliest melodramas of Pixérécourt [1] translated into English, the character of a British sailor is most absurdly introduced for a patriotic purpose. The elder Charles Mathews, in his famous "At Homes," never failed to raise a laugh when he imitated the members of unpopular nationalities. Even Douglas Jerrold, in *The Prisoners of War*, made use of the same resource, although his sword was two-edged and his satire more keen against English pride than French eccentricity.

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[1] *The Wife of Two Husbands*, translated and adapted by Cobb from *La Femme à Deux Maris*, given at Drury Lane, Nov. 1, 1803. See notice in *Times*, Nov. 2, 1803.

Foreigners, who occasionally attempted to win favor on the London stage, were welcomed according to the political barometer. Cordial were the receptions of Mars, Rachel, and Fechter, but bitterly hostile was that accorded the ill-starred troop of French players who appeared on the Drury Lane stage in 1848, shortly after the unpopular *coup d'état*. These unfortunates were ferociously hounded out of the "sanctuary" they had "desecrated."

Americans were given a courteous and fair, if not always an enthusiastic, hearing. The unpleasant Macready-Forrest incident was not an exception, for, like the shameful treatment of the elder Kean in Boston, Massachusetts, it was the result of Forrest's own indiscretion, and was in no sense the expression of national hostility. That such was the case, Charlotte Cushman's favorable reception at the very same time clearly proved. As dramatists, John Howard Payne and Mrs. Mowatt, and, as actors, Edwin Booth and Joseph Jefferson, enjoyed much popularity. In general it may be said that Americans received such attention as they deserved.

By far the most important point of contact between the stage and the life of the city was the subjection of the drama to the rising tide of democracy. At the turn of the century the theatres succumbed to the rabble as a weakened constitution might to a virulent disease. The infection was immediate and complete. The theatres seemed to invite the masses as never before, and the masses had soon made the theatres almost exclusively their own; for the aristocracy and the intellectuals gradually withdrew as the populace advanced. One of the most constant grievances of the managers throughout the first half of the century was that only their pits and galleries were filled, for only on rare occasions could the aristocracy be induced to attend.

All contemporary observers testify to this marked change in the character of the audiences at Drury Lane and Covent Garden after they were rebuilt and enlarged. Covent Garden, thus converted into a vast auditorium, was reopened in 1792, and Drury Lane in 1794 was rebuilt to accommodate over five hundred more spectators than its rival. It seated, in all, 3611 persons. Both houses had been almost doubled in size. That this change in itself was one of the most injurious of the evil-working influences upon the drama all contemporary critics believed. It was especially serious in its effect because only at these two theatres could the spoken drama legally be presented before 1843. All the niceties of acting were lost upon most of the audience, and, as a result, the accessories of music and spectacle, and later of horsemanship, aquatics, and menageries, were indispensable to keep the theatres from utter failure. It was only natural that such a change should repel the judicious and attract those of cruder tastes. When we remember that the theatres had been thus enlarged to meet an increased demand on the part of the lower classes, we must realize that much of the abuse heaped upon the new houses was justified.

Kemble's biographer, Boaden, thus describes the change from the old theatres:

> Our present theatres differ materially from that of Garrick. The gallery formed more of his plan than it does of ours. It came down upon the lower circle of the boxes, and its visitors were not seldom exceedingly intelligent persons and passionate admirers of the drama: they sat in a very favorable position for the enjoyment of the play, and seconded the pit in a just distribution of censure and praise. The boxes did not con-

tain anything like the number of persons now nightly visitors to the theatre, but certainly much more real fashion.[1]

What the results of the change were is well indicated by the testimony of Richard Cumberland in his *Theatrical Retrospections*. Speaking of Kemble's attempt to uphold the Garrick traditions, Cumberland declared:

> [Kemble] struggles against a torrent of mummery and machinery and song and spectacle, which the circumstances of the times he lives in and of the stage he treads, render it impossible for him to do more than struggle with: it is a turbid torrent which he cannot stem. If he cannot trust himself to the character of even *Macbeth* on the little stage of the Haymarket without *Mother Goose* to cackle in his afterpiece, neither could Garrick have filled that Coliseum, which now is in ruin [Covent Garden], unless Johnson had drawn out his elephants to allure the gapers into the galleries: all the intelligence of his eye, the archness of his smile, the movement of his brow, the touching pathos of his undertones, spent in their passage through the misty void, would have failed to reach the outskirts of that greedy theatre, — and he would have found himself only understood in the neighborhood of the orchestra.[2]

A writer for the *Theatrical Inquisitor* in 1813 in a burst of despair averred that "of the inmates of a theatre, constituted as our audiences now are, nine tenths know little and care less about dramatic excellencies: they have no ear but for music, no eyes but for processions." [3]

There can be little doubt that the size of the theatres played a major part in the deterioration of audiences; but as Cumberland implies, when he speaks of the necessity of Mother Goose to make even Kemble successful in the little Haymarket Theatre, the nature of the theatre-going public had itself changed greatly since the days of Garrick.

[1] Boaden, Life of *J. P. Kemble*, Book II, p. 41.

[2] Quoted and endorsed by *Theatrical Inquisitor*, March, 1813.

[3] *Ibid.*, Dec., 1813, p. 343.

The triumph of democracy at the theatres was marked by the O. P. riots in 1809. Thereafter theatrical managers could have had no doubts as to their future masters. So significant was this event that I must afford space for an account of it.

The riots began upon the reopening of Covent Garden under the management of John Philip Kemble in 1809. The immediate cause was an advance of sixpence in the price of the pit. As Nicholson has shown, these riots were in reality the expression of general dissatisfaction. In vain Kemble pleaded before the curtain that the four-shilling price of admission to the pit was necessary to keep the theatre from ruin. Before he had finished speaking the riot began. It was by no means a disconnected outburst, but was a fight waged in a general cause — not only the right of democracy to theatrical entertainment at a low price; but also the right of that democracy to a voice in the management of its theatres. This same voice was to be heard again and again during our period, by failing dramatists, by offending managers, and by actors, whether, like Kean in 1825, they merited the public scorn, or whether, like the French company in 1848, they were the innocent victims of popular caprice.

The disturbances were organized by a band of "Pittites" known as the O.P.'s from their call for "old prices." The outrages they committed were matched by Kemble's tactless and ridiculous means of defence. The wildest scenes were witnessed during this theatrical warfare.[1]

The excitement was intense long before the audiences were in the theatre. Carriages, hackney coaches, and chairs rushed madly about in the ghastly stench of the link boys' torches; women screamed and fainted. The

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[1] The account I give is based partly on reminiscences by Bestow, editor of the *Theatrical Journal*, who had participated in the riots. See *Theat. Jour.* articles 1846, and also for Aug. 13 and 20, 1862. See also contemporary numbers of the *Times*. An extended account is to be found in the *Covent Garden Journal* by Stockade, 1810.

O. P.'s were everywhere busy sticking placards on the persons of all who entered the theatre, and perhaps thrusting into their hands a tin horn or a watchman's rattle. The placards conveyed some dread message, like

O. P.
KEMBLE TREMBLE !!!!

The faces of the O. P.'s themselves were blackened. They carried standards which were not only morally persuasive, but which served also as weapons. On them appeared such devices as

JOHN BULL WILL HAVE HIS RIGHTS

BOXES BE FIRM

BE SILENT: KING JOHN'S HEAD AITCHES.[1]

KEMBLE LEARN:
JOHN BULL ADVISES,
TO SAVE YOUR FAME
LOWER YOUR PRICES.

Inside the theatre at least half of the audience appeared with O. P. insignia. The actor Cooke, who was frequently offered up to this wild public, fortified himself with more than his usual quantity of drink. The interest, however, soon changed from the stage to the audience, where the entertainment generally assumed the form of a free fight between the O. P.'s and professional "bruisers" indiscreetly employed by Kemble to combat the rioters. The actors, who up to this time had proceeded in dumb-show, were driven from the stage, and the theatre was given over to the din of the rioters.

This behavior was not confined to a few evenings, but continued unabated, in spite of the hired boxers, arrests, and prosecutions, from the beginning of September until the 23d of that month. The managers then submitted to arbitration, closing the theatre in the meantime. Since the committee appointed, backed by the *Times* and the *Post*, decided in Kemble's favor, rioting was at once renewed. *Richard* and *Shylock* were again driven from the stage before standards fiercely asserting:

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[1] A hit at Kemble's pedantic mispronunciation.

THE TIMES AND POST
ARE BOUGHT AND SOLD
BY KEMBLE'S PRIDE
AND KEMBLE'S GOLD.

The second outbreak was even worse than the first. The O. P.'s appeared clothed as butchers. Snuff was scattered through the theatre, and sparrows were let loose. The "bruisers" attended in still greater numbers, and their battles were the only entertainment during many of the evenings in which Kemble stubbornly fought the rabble. At last the management consented to a second arbitration. But by this time the cry of the rioters had been changed from "old prices" to "no hired bruisers" and "no legal prosecutions." Kemble had even threatened the public with a water engine.

After sixty-one nights of rioting, a truce was reached and all those chiefly concerned sat down at a peace banquet given by the O. P.'s on December 14.[1] As a result of this agreement the number of the boxes was reduced, thus making room for more shilling places in the balconies. The price for box seats was reduced again to seven shillings, and the price of places in the pit to three shillings and sixpence. Even after this event, rioting continued until an offending box-keeper had been removed, and Kemble himself had been dragged before the curtain to promise that the insult of professional bruisers should not be repeated, and to apologize for his own part in the shameful affair.

Although the O. P. rioting was the fiercest expression of the new theatrical democracy, it was none the less expressive of a new influence upon the drama. This influence has in a measure survived until the present day. London managers still feel a sense of relief if the "Gallery First Nighters" and other such public-spirited organizations allow a new production to proceed in peace. The O. P. fury of condemnation, however, has abated: many an old-school playgoer wishes on occasion that it might be revived.

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[1] The disturbances lasted from Sept. 18 to Dec. 17, 1809.

The coming of the democracy was not, perhaps, as significant in the history of the stage as the withdrawal of the classes it replaced. The aristocracy and the more critical and intelligent of the general public abandoned the theatres almost altogether. It was the hope of every ambitious manager during the first half of the century to win them back. Macready, Vestris, and, especially, the younger Kean, made this effort. Each in some measure succeeded, although the success at best was small.

What was worse, the attention bestowed by the aristocracy upon the stage was not always of a nature to assist those artists who were earnestly striving for its uplift. All critics complained that the aristocrats could find no good in anything dramatic that was not of foreign origin. In this connection it is amusing to read that fashion abandoned the legitimate drama to patronize an American negro-minstrel troop that visited London in 1847.[1] When they did attend dramatic representations, they came not so much to honor playwright or actor as to display themselves before royalty at a commanded performance. At such times they not infrequently showed an utter unconcern for the entertainment of the evening, as was notably the case when a gala performance of *Macbeth* was commanded in 1858, in celebration of a royal wedding. Talking and preoccupation with the honored guests turned the play into an empty form. Boucicault no doubt had the theatres in mind when, in *London Assurance*, he made Grace describe "the idol fashion" as "a mighty giant lying all over Europe." "It pillows its head in Italy," she says, "its heart in France, leaving its heels alone its sole support for England."

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[1] *Theat. Jour.*, May 22, 1847.

Although the absence of the upper classes may be sufficiently explained by the size and nature of the theatres and the invasion of the democracy, there were other causes contributing to the same end. Apart from the acting of a few geniuses like Siddons, Kemble, Elliston, and Mathews, there could have been comparatively little to attract a fastidious taste in the best performances of tragedy and comedy. The prevailing mood of acting, not wholly the result of the large theatres, was excessively artificial. Significant was the testimony given by manager Harris of Covent Garden in a chancery suit, that his theatre had not made a single shilling on the regular drama from 1809 to 1821, but had subsisted entirely upon pantomime, spectacle, and melodrama.[1] Well might a writer in the *Quarterly Review*[2] declare: "Very few of real readers could ever enjoy any play throughout." He asks: "Who ever saw one of Shakespeare's plays presented worthily except, perhaps, by one actor?" Hazlitt seems to have shared this opinion.[3]

Another objection that told heavily against the drama with all decent people was the revolting freedom with which prostitution paraded at the theatres. Instead of opposing it, managers made use of this traffic to fill their empty boxes, and deliberately issued "orders" for this purpose. So excessive was the abuse that all observers spoke of it with the utmost astonishment and disgust.[4] Even as late as 1844 a writer in the *Theatrical Journal* described the theatres as "great public brothels," and remarked, "Surely no man would be mad enough to say that the saloons of our theatres are not the very hot-beds

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[1] *Theatrical Observer*, Oct. 5, 1832, no. 3372.

[2] Vol. xxxiii.

[3] See page 177.

[4] See Pückler-Muskau's *Tour of a German Prince*, vol. iii, Letter 5.

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of vice . . . they are turned into houses of ill-fame on a large scale."[1] One theatre, the New Standard in the Strand, even went so far as to build a special approach for decent people to certain parts of the house. Macready was the first manager to act vigorously against this abomination; the stage, and, indeed, English culture, are deeply in his debt for this crusade.[2] The *Theatrical Journal* asserted that he accomplished the miracle of abolishing the practice single-handed, and "made the saloon a fit resort for any gentleman or lady."

Beside such repellent influences, there was one of a seductive nature that was not infrequently blamed for keeping the aristocracy from the theatres, namely, the Italian opera given at its special home, the King's Theatre. This opera house in the Haymarket during the previous century had been the favorite resort of the aristocracy, and was regarded as one of the most brilliant places of entertainment in the world. In the nineteenth century it became fashion's only place of theatrical amusement. This period was, indeed, one of extraordinary operatic brilliancy. Baker in his *History of the London Stage* pronounces it without qualification the most brilliant in the history of opera in England.

Although the theatres made every effort to compete musically with the Italian opera, it is not surprising that the aristocracy did not respond to their inducements, if we may judge of them by the following account by the German Prince, Pückler-Muskau:

> I saw Mozart's *Figaro* announced at Drury Lane, and I delighted myself with the idea of hearing once more the sweet tones of my fatherland; what, then, was my astonishment at the unheard-of treatment which the master work of the im-

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[1] *Theat. Jour.*, July 27, 1844.

[2] See Lewes, Introduction to *Selections from the Modern British Drama;* also Macready's statement, *Theat. Obs.*, Oct. 6, 1841, no. 6174; also *Theat. Jour.*, July 27, 1844.

> mortal composer had received at English hands.[1] You will hardly believe me when I tell you that neither the Count, the Countess, nor Figaro sang. These parts were given to mere actors, and their principal songs, with some little alteration in the words, were sung by the other singers: to add to this, the gardner roared out some interpolated popular English songs which suited Mozart's music just as a pitch plaster would suit the face of the Venus de Medici. . . . This abominable practice is the more inexcusable since here is really no want of meritorious singers male and female. . . . It is true even if the stage were in good order a second Orpheus would still be required to tame English audiences.[2]

Little wonder that aristocracy preferred foreign opera under foreign auspices. Only occasionally were the tables turned. Weber's *Der Freischütz* [3] in 1824 and his *Oberon* in 1826 attracted society to Covent Garden. Later, too, the works of Balfe and Wallace promised the creation of an English opera at the old patent theatres. Fashion still preferred opera in its old home. Catalini, Malibran, Sontag, Pasta, Grisi, and Alboni, however, were to be heard at the patent theatres for short engagements at various times. Bunn at Drury Lane all but secured Jenny Lind for her London début. Such appearances were in violation of the triple agreement between the Italian opera on the one hand and the two patent theatres on the other — an understanding which had been in force since 1792.

Certainly these attempts failed to draw the aristocracy back to the theatres. The fashionable world remained faithful to the Italian Opera House until its destruction in 1867. At that time Covent Garden inherited its distinction as the home of foreign opera; but already the charm of opera was on the wane. Its future even more than its past — for opera had never proved financially successful — was to be a long struggle against failure.

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[1] The arrangement was by Bishop.

[2] *Tour of a German Prince*, vol. iii, Letter 6, Dec. 1, 1826.

[3] Composed by Weber, and conducted by him in person at the request of Charles Kemble. The English libretto was by J. J. Planché.

The example of royalty is the last we shall mention, and perhaps one of the strongest, of the influences that induced the aristocracy to absent itself from the theatres. Until the reign of Victoria, the royal family avoided the theatres almost entirely. Except for a yearly performance "commanded by His Majesty," duly announced, and attended by vast throngs that came to gaze rather at the royal box than at the stage, no encouragement appears to have been given the drama by any of the first three rulers of the century. Victoria, however, almost from the beginning of her reign paid much more respect to dramatic art. She attended more frequently and with less formality. Her choice of plays was made from an unmistakable knowledge of the trend of events on the stage. She showed marked favors to worthy actors and actresses. Charles Kean and Macready she honored with audiences and gifts. The Prince Consort shared this interest,[1] not only patronizing the professional stage, but lending his name with the Queen's as a patron of amateur theatricals.[2] So intimate was her friendship for the worthy actress, Mrs. Warner, that after that lady's powers declined, the Queen gave her the use each day of a royal carriage.[3]

The principal evidence of her interest, however, was the institution of a long series of theatricals at Windsor Castle. They began under the management of Charles Kean in 1849.[4] The Queen's motives, it must be admitted, were political as well as æsthetic, but the form her patronage took showed a genuine interest in the stage.

In 1848 a company of French players ventured to present a version of *Monte Cristo* in Drury Lane Theatre. In spite of the fact that French companies had visited London frequently before, and had been received with respect and even enthusiasm, these unfortunates were shamefully driven from the stage by a ruffian crowd of theatrical people, who loudly proclaimed themselves defenders of English art. The immediate incentive to attack was the presence at the same time in London of three other French companies. When these foreigners had the boldness to appear on the sacred boards of Drury Lane, the down-trodden profession could no longer brook the insult. The assault enjoyed popular encouragement for political reasons. The *Theatrical Journal*[1] called upon the public "singly and collectively to set their faces against this new attempt to un-Anglicize our public amusements, and to give the entertainment such a reception as will convince these foreigners that what we have to give shall only be bestowed on those who merit our approbation." It enumerated the following reasons to justify its position:

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[1] *Theat. Jour.*, Jan. 1, 1862.

[2] *Ibid.*, March 2, 1853, and Oct. 10, 1866, and *Theat. Obs.*, July 6, 1848.

[3] *Theat. Jour.*, Oct. 4, 1854.

[4] For a full account of them see J. K. Chapman's *Complete History of Theatrical Entertainment*, etc.

1. France in the recent revolution had not been true to her profession of equity.
2. Many English laborers had been unjustly driven out of France.
3. At this time more than ever English dramatic art needed London's support.
4. French morals were objectionable.
5. Three houses were already occupied by foreigners.

In conclusion, the writer asked: "Why does the Queen and court so often patronize these foreigners and so seldom visit any English playhouse?" A petition was presented to the government, demanding the restriction of the "number of foreign theatres." During the first night of *Monte Cristo* the audience hissed throughout five acts of dumb-show. The second night was worse. Even the *Theatrical Journal*,[2] which, as we have just seen, had encouraged the action, declared:

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[1] June 8, 1848.

[2] June 22, 1848.

> Drury Lane has now been "desecrated" indeed, not by the exhibition of a brute trainer and his lions and tigers . . . but by a class of persons who will not conduct themselves respectably, . . . For two nights some two hundred or so of what the *Times* calls the "scum of the theatrical profession" have been straining every nerve to accomplish their Herculean labor . . . roaring and clamoring . . . with hands and voice (not to mention such inconsiderable trifles as bludgeons, bells, rattles, and whistles) and all to drown the voices and to hoot and drive from the stage of the Drury Lane Theatre, a score or two of innocent Frenchmen . . . and they have triumphed! . . . O, we blush for the honor of England at the thought! The victory of the catcall! Why were we so hasty in condemning the fury of the Parisian mob, when it drove the English railway laborers from the shores of France?

"The Queen resolved to give her patronage to the English drama," Chapman tells us, "and attended Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kean's benefit on July 3, 1848, and on July 10, 1848, that of William Macready."[1] In the following November — at this time Macready was away from London — she appointed Charles Kean to assume the duties of the old "master of revels," and she commanded him to present with the best casts available a series of plays each year, generally in January, in the Rubens room at Windsor Castle. She was to make the choice of plays herself. That she was well aware of the significant stage events of her reign is shown by her selections: works by J. Maddison Morton, Jerrold, and Boucicault were given a hearing, as well as the plays of the older dramatists. *The Stranger*, a translation from the German of Kotzebue, was also selected. After 1858 these performances were for a while discontinued because, it was believed, the actor Rogers publicly resented the pay (13*s* 4*d*) he had received for a performance, which sum he ostentatiously presented to the poor. Later the commanded performances at Windsor were resumed, but not under Kean's management.

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[1] J. K. Chapman's *Complete History of Theatrical Entertainment*, etc.

The importance of this patronage cannot, I believe, be overestimated in its effect upon audiences. From this time on, the upper classes showed a far greater interest in the stage than hitherto. Kean's theatre, the Princess's, opened by him in 1850, was chiefly benefited. Kean, as we shall see later, made every effort to deserve and keep this patronage.

A brighter day had dawned. The tide of aristocratic favor had turned toward the drama. At first, this new interest was sparing and intermittent. It was given a new impetus by the Robertsonian school of 1865, and by 1870 it had become constant. No one cause was entirely responsible for the change. The most important inducements were: Macready's scholarly and artistic standards, and his suppression of vice; Victoria's enthusiastic patronage; Kean's sumptuous staging; and, perhaps greatest of all, the legal recognition of small theatres, making possible the work of Kean at the Princess's, of Vestris and Mathews at the Lyceum, and of Robertson and the Bancrofts at the Prince of Wales's.

Next to influences of a social nature, that of the theatrical monopoly was surely the most prejudicial to the drama. Hardly any phase of our study may be approached without some reference to it. We must, then, without further delay, make ourselves familiar with this complicated and disagreeable, but inevitable subject.

Chapter II

THEATRICAL MONOPOLY[1]

IF ghos'es want me to believe in 'em," says a character in *Silas Marner*, "let 'em leave off sulking in the dark and lone places — let 'em come where there 's company and candles." So said the theatrical democracy to the ghosts of the patents granted by Charles II to Killigrew and Davenant. These documents were still cherished in 1800 by the managers of Drury Lane and Covent Garden as the authority for their exclusive rights to present the spoken drama. For the first forty-three years of the century the democracy persisted, till at last the holders of these rights were forced to exhibit them before "company and candles," when lo! they made themselves thin air into which they vanished. I wish I might pass over this unpleasant subject; to use the words of Rousseau, "Je sais bien que le lecteur n'a pas grand besoin de savoir tout cela; mais moi, j'ai grand besoin de le lui dire."

To make clear the channels of dramatic progress, I must first point out the buoys arbitrarily set by the government to mark them. Our course becomes confused because these marks frequently changed, and the navigators of small theatrical enterprises often made bold to ignore them. Out of this very confusion, however, arose tendencies which, although harmful in the main, gave rise to new and interesting dramatic types.

At the beginning of the century, by virtue of the patent rights, Drury Lane and Covent Garden enjoyed the exclusive privilege of presenting what consequently was known as the "legitimate" drama, or, as it was sometimes called, the "regular" drama. All other theatres, excepting the Haymarket in the summer months, were by these monopoly restrictions obliged to represent only the "illegitimate," or "irregular," drama. Although the meaning of these terms was plain enough at the beginning of our period, by 1832 no one seemed clearly to understand them. In 1800 the "legitimate" drama meant, to all concerned, any form of spoken dialogue; whereas the "illegitimate" drama was entertainment in which nothing could be said without musical accompaniment. By 1832 perhaps the best definition that could be given was that suggested by Douglas Jerrold before the Select Committee appointed by Parliament in 1832 to report on the state of the drama. A play was "legitimate," he said, "when the interest of the piece is mental rather than physical." Similarly Macready defined the term as applying to a play of poetic quality or superior literary worth.[1]

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[1] Watson Nicholson's *The Struggle for a Free Stage*, to which I am much indebted, gives the history of the monopoly with great care in all its details. For the censorship of the drama, see the booklet, *The Dramatic Censor*, by G. M. G., London, 1908.

The vagueness of the monopoly rights was greatly increased by the uncertainty of their legal status. These rights rested not only upon the original patents but upon three other legal enactments of a confusing and contradictory nature. The patents granted by Charles II to Davenant and Killigrew in 1660 created an absolute monopoly, for the purpose of avoiding entertainments "that doe containe much matter of prophanation and scurrility," in favor of such as might "serve as instruction in humane life." In 1800, however, the status of the monopoly was by no means so clear.

Although both the Covent Garden and Drury Lane theatres had enjoyed monopoly privileges during the eighteenth century, it appeared in 1792 that Covent Garden owned both of the original patents.[1] Sheridan was suddenly aroused to the fact that his theatre existed without legal warrant, and was liable to closure and prosecution at the whim of his rival and the government. To strengthen his credit with the financial backers of his new house, he accordingly purchased from manager Harris of Covent Garden what was known as the "dormant" patent, for which Sheridan paid twenty thousand pounds. Although many years later these papers were proved to be legally worthless, Sheridan and his creditors enjoyed the immunity they had paid for.

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[1] See the report of the Select Committee on the drama, of which Bulwer-Lytton was chairman. It was published and given wide circulation in 1832.

The government's interference with the drama, however, was generally based on three legal enactments entirely separate from the patents. The first of these was the Licensing Act of 1737 (10 George II).[2] It gave to the crown and the lord chamberlain unlimited powers of license and censorship within the confines of the city of Westminster,[3] and as clearly limited their powers to that district. In practice, however, it was intended, and had been used, merely as a warrant to suppress minor theatres.

This inconsistency led to a long series of misunderstandings and embarrassments in the beginning of our period. Lord Dartmouth, who held the chamberlain's office shortly after the turn of the century, chose to accept the law at its face value, and accordingly granted a considerable number of licenses to minor houses for the "illegitimate" drama. This was a marked departure from the policy of his predecessors, who had regarded the act as an enforcement and not an abrogation of the patent privileges.[1] Before 1800 only two such "illegitimate" houses, and these very insignificant, had been allowed in the city of Westminster. From 1800 on, however, the historical practice and the clear meaning of the law were to clash. Each succeeding lord chamberlain varied the policy of licensing. The liberals, like Lord Dartmouth, interpreted the act literally and so granted licenses freely; others adhered more closely to the historical practice, which sustained the patent houses without rivals.[2]

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[1] The Drury Lane patent had been purchased by Rich to secure a complete monopoly for his Covent Garden Theatre in 1732. See p. 60, n. 1.

[2] The wording of this law seemed clearly to indicate an extension of the licensing power; but its enactment by Walpole's government was intended to give the necessary authority to suppress such annoying political satires as Fielding's burlesques. Although it allowed the chamberlain to license theatrical entertainments in addition to those sanctioned by the letters patent, it was clearly intended to crush the little Haymarket Theatre and several other less important houses that had recently come into existence. It was so understood by the chamberlain and the king, and so applied, except in the case of the Haymarket in the summer, during the remainder of the century. There were two other provisions of importance in this act. One was that all theatres should be within the limits of the city of Westminster or any place where the royal family might reside. The other, though merely implicit, was the vesting of the rights of censorship in the chamberlain, for it required all plays to be in his hands a fortnight before representation.

[3] See map, p. 58.

In brief, then, the monopoly rights of Drury Lane and Covent Garden during the last decade of the eighteenth century were based upon a clearly defined patent privilege, enforced by the Licensing Act of 1737, which, although it literally provided for the extension of privileges to other houses within the city of Westminster, was generally understood by the government and the theatres to be merely an enforcement of the traditional patents. Accordingly the two great theatres regarded the law as a bulwark of defence.

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[1] Although one of the two patent houses owned both letters patent, the king and his chamberlain had previously chosen rather to respect the original intent of these patents, and accordingly had allowed two theatres to present the spoken drama in the winter season, and had forbidden other houses to present anything but music and dumb-show.

[2] The celebrated evasions of the licensing act in Macklin's *School*, and Foote's *Dish of Tea*, were based on the clause limiting the effect of the law to performances for "hire, gain, or reward," and they need not detain us in considering the effect of the law in general. The license later granted to Foote for summer performances at his theatre in the Haymarket in no wise violated the spirit of the patent rights, for the managers of the patent theatres gave their consent to the arrangement, and it was tacitly understood that the summer theatre should be open when the others were closed. Fixed dates limiting the summer season had been prescribed in the permission granted to Foote, and later the managers of the Haymarket, as we shall see, made use of this strategic advantage in the first actions of the general war against the patent theatres.

Had not the legal situation been further complicated, perhaps no serious difficulties would have arisen. All London would have gone to Westminster for its entertainment, and the sovereign, or his chamberlain, would have been guided in his control of the theatres by the manifest needs of the city.

Other districts of London, however, needed places of entertainment. Many houses had long existed in remote regions by subterfuge or defiance. One was Odell's Ayliff Street house[1] in Goodman's Fields, where Garrick first made his appearance to a London audience. The most notorious was Sadler's Wells,[2] on the northern outskirts of the city. It had existed as a place of resort since 1684.[3] As early as 1699 it was looked upon as a resort for

> vermin trained up to the gallows,
> As buttocks and files, housebreakers and padders,
> With prizefighters, sweet'ners, and such sort of traders,
> Informers, thief-takers, deer-stealers, and bullies.[4]

Such places, if not regulated by some stronger legislation than the prohibition of "theatrical entertainment," were bound to be a menace. Hence the second act of Parliament[5] in 1752. This law required that all places of amusement, whether in the city of Westminster or elsewhere, should be licensed, and it gave authority to *local magistrates* to grant such licenses at their quarter sessions of the peace. Any person keeping a "house, room or garden" for public entertainment without license was to be fined one hundred pounds, as the law "directs in cases of disorderly houses."

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[1] See map, p. 58, no. 18.

[2] See map, p. 58, no. 5.

[3] Not, as Nicholson says, from the time of the Commonwealth. Cf. Baker, p. 355.

[4] Ned Ward's *London Spy*, quoted by Baker, p. 356.

[5] 25 George II, later confirmed and perpetuated in 28 George II.

This enactment gave rise to even more confusion than the Licensing Act. Here again the wording and the express intention of the law were completely at variance. No definition of the kind of entertainment to be allowed was provided in the act, and therefore it contained no prohibition of spoken drama in theatres outside of the city of Westminster. No one, however, thought of construing it as an abrogation of the patent rights until, in 1787, John Powers, armed with a license from a magistrate of the Tower, opened his Royalty Theatre[1] in East London with a performance of *As You Like It.* The patent theatres protested, and Powers was informed by the government that the magistrate's license was good only for performances of dancing, pantomime, and music, although the only bill making such a specific statement was defeated in Parliament the following year.[2]

Here, then, was a law permitting the spread of theatres all over the city at the discretion of the local magistrates. Only by a vague understanding between the chamberlain's office and these magistrates were such theatres to be restricted to the "illegitimate" drama, that is, to dancing, pantomime, and music. Except in the case of the unfortunate Powers, no friction arose from this vagueness before the beginning of our period: but during the first forty years of the nineteenth century there was no end of confusion caused by the difference of opinion between the chamberlain and the magistrates as to the exact meaning of the "illegitimate" drama. Perhaps to this conflict of authority more than to any other circumstance, the theatrical monopoly owed its downfall. By 1832, at any rate, the rights of the theatre owners had become hopelessly confused by these inconsistencies, and the theatrical monopoly was manifestly doomed. An amusing instance, which shows how these conflicting powers of license worked against the privileged theatres, was the lord chamberlain's refusal to allow the patentees to give performances on the Wednesdays and Fridays of Lent, although at the very same time at least a half dozen minor theatres, and some within the sacred limits of Westminster, were allowed by the magistrates unblushingly to profane the season.[1]

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[1] See map, p. 58, no. 8.

[2] The Interlude Bill, defeated in 1788.

The last of the three laws [2] regulating the drama need not detain us. It confirmed previous enactments and granted licensing privileges to magistrates all over the kingdom beyond a twenty-mile limit from London. Many of the larger cities, like Manchester, Newcastle, Bath, Chester, Bristol, Kingston, York, Liverpool, Birmingham, Margate, and Edinburgh, already had theatres existing by royal patent. The present law allowed magistrates to license performances of the "legitimate" drama for a period of sixty days in any town or city of the kingdom. This regulation does not concern us except as it greatly enlarged the sphere of the actor's profession, and gave employment to many companies thrown out of work at the London theatres. Such was the romantic, though wretched life, of "the circuit."

To summarize: the monopoly rights of the "major" or "legitimate" houses rested, at the opening of the century, upon the letters patent of Charles II, reinforced by unlimited powers in the hands of the crown and the lord chamberlain to license or suppress performances throughout the city of Westminster. Since no one at that time questioned the validity of the letters patent, the king and his chamberlain used these powers chiefly to suppress all rivals of the patent theatres, or, at least, to limit them to the presentation of dancing, pantomime, and music. Similar powers of license had been granted to magistrates in all parts of the city, and also were construed as serving the same purpose. Only those magistrates whose jurisdiction extended beyond the twenty-mile limit, it was gen-

[1] See Nicholson, pp. 391 ff.

[2] 28 George III, c. 30.

erally understood, might sanction performances of the "legitimate" drama.

No one in 1800 dreamed of the possibilities of evasion dormant in this legal travesty. In reality, a more illogical and baffling array of legislation is hardly conceivable. As finally regarded, after thirty years of demoralizing practice, its effect was to grant untenable rights which it failed to define; to inflict penalities for offences which no one could clearly comprehend; and, worse than all, to allow two conflicting authorities to settle disputes concerning these open questions independently and according to personal caprice, and to exercise the same powers of license in the same place and at the same time. After a conflict lasting nearly forty years, these laws were dragged by the indignant theatrical democracy before "company and candles," and their worthlessness was revealed. In the meantime the dramatic profession was reduced to a condition just short of annihilation.

In the give and take between the "majors" (the patent houses) and the "minors" (houses existing under the acts of parliament) lies much of the dramatic history with which we are concerned. We must, therefore, follow the stages of this contest.

The first open defiance of the patent rights was John Palmer's futile attempt to present *As You Like It*, with only the sanction of the magistrate's license. The charge of "vagrancy" [1] brought against him by the managers of the major houses would certainly have been established, had not Palmer himself recognized the hoplessness of his case. With the chamberlain, the crown, and a half-century of precedent against him, he hastily abandoned Shakespeare, for the usual "illegitimate" performances of dancing, dumb-show, and "burlettas." [2]

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[1] The preamble of the Licensing Act revived the vagrancy law (12 Anne) according to which unlicensed actors were termed "vagrants" and "sturdy beggars."

[2] Palmer made one more desperate attempt to get a license for the legitimate drama, applying this time to Parliament. His petition was refused on

This term "burletta" held the centre of the stage in all the subsequent quarrels between the majors and minors. Although later it was used with the greatest freedom to apply to almost any piece that contained music, in 1787, at the time of John Palmer's defiance, it meant a light musical piece, generally of a burlesque nature, without a word of spoken dialogue. Action that could not be carried on by song was performed in dumb-show, and often huge pieces of cloth with inscriptions, hung about the stage, helped to make the dumb-show intelligible[1] — an interesting anticipation of the "movies." The essential point was that nothing should be spoken. Shortly after the Licensing Act became law, action was brought against a small house in which a clown had indiscreetly spoken the words "roast beef" unaccompanied by music.[2] Similarly, in the case of poor Palmer's theatre after it had become a "burletta" house two actors, because of some words they let slip without a musical cadence, were convicted as vagabonds.[3] Such proceedings, then, made clear enough to all concerned the kind of entertainment allowed at the minor houses. The term "burletta" naturally came to have a legal significance, and designated precisely any performance without spoken dialogue.

If anything was to be accomplished in favor of the minors, it was clear that, first of all, the attitude of the licensers must be modified. Strangely enough, the lord chamberlain's office itself, without any special pressure brought to bear upon it, made the first concessions. In 1804 the Earl of Dartmouth, as lord chamberlain, had

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the ground that not even the king himself had power to grant licenses outside of Westminster. There was but one course left — to content himself with speechless drama. The first skirmish between majors and minors was ended, and as a result the patent houses were more secure than ever.

[1] See p. 34.

[2] See *Stage Censor* by G. M. G., p. 94.

[3] They were later discharged, but the magistrate who let them go was himself fined. See Nicholson, p. 113.

such liberal views regarding his licensing power as to entertain a petition from Colonel Fulke Greville for a license, not only to present opera, but also to present "genuine comedy and approved good tragedy."[1]

Although this was far too bold a request for Lord Dartmouth to grant, he showed clearly that his sympathies were with the petitioner. He went as far as he could with safety, granting licenses for the "illegitimate" drama with a liberality that enraged the patentees, whose territory was thus ruthlessly invaded.[2]

Although Dartmouth in no wise extended the long admitted rights of the lord chamberlain's office, he was the first to encourage the "illegitimate" drama in the city of Westminster, thus bringing the major and minor houses more directly into competition than ever before. The relaxation of the official attitude was soon followed, in 1809, by the significant triumph of democracy in the O. P. riots, which, as Nicholson has clearly shown, were, at least in part, an expression of discontent with the whole fabric of theatrical monopoly. The times seemed ripe for a rival theatre. Accordingly, in 1810 a company of gentlemen petitioned the king to grant a license for a third theatre. The petition was not granted. The patent ghosts, however, had been summoned to make their first appearance before "company and candles." This time the king took the initiative. He laid the petition before the Privy Council and called upon the attorney-general and solicitor-general for an opinion. A hearing was granted the petitioners, who appeared with able counsel, and subjected the old patent rights to a scrutiny which showed them to have little or no efficacy against the petitioners. It was, at least, significant that, when the solicitor-general at last rendered an adverse decision, it was based, not upon patent rights, but upon subsidiary and technical points, such as the unfair advantage of an "incorporated charter" which the petitioners requested, and a failure to safeguard the interest of creditors.[1]

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[1] See Nicholson, p. 163.

[2] By 1807 he had granted at least seven licenses for minor houses in Westminster, although only two of any great importance resulted. These were the Olympic Pavilion in Wych Street and the Adelphi in the Strand (see map, p. 58, nos. 11 and 12), both of which opened in 1806. Shortly afterwards, in 1809, the Queen's opened with a magistrate's license, outside of the city of Westminster near Tottenham Court Road. No one at that time mistrusted that this somewhat remote and wretched little house would one day be the scene of a dramatic revolution.

In spite of defeat, the minors had been considerably emboldened by these proceedings. It had, at least, become painfully certain to the patentees that their patents no longer conferred monopoly rights. The king, and even the lord chamberlain, had clearly the power to grant "legitimate" privileges whenever they were bold enough to run counter to the usage of a century. Fortunately for the patentees this usage in itself was almost as good as a law, and for the time being it served to safeguard their interests.

When the petitioners for the third theatre, as a last resort, turned to Parliament, they were again rebuffed. The Third Theatre bill was defeated April 28, 1813. To all outward appearances the cause of the minors had received a setback from which it was not likely to recover. The patentees took courage and made extensive plans for the future. One powerful influence, however, they had not sufficiently taken into account. Popular opinion had during these legal proceedings turned strongly in favor of the abused minors, the more so because it had already, in the O. P. riots, turned strongly against the majors.

Finding all doors firmly closed against a legal satisfaction of their aspirations, the ambitious minor lessees bent all their energies in another direction. One course — a more favorable one than at first appeared — remained open, that of an evasive interpretation of the term "burletta." This course offered but slight hope, but in the end it proved the way to victory. It was a sorry commentary upon the government's attitude, that when not only popular favor, but justice, common sense, and even the interests of the drama, were on the side of the minors, the government forced them to resort to subterfuge in order to fulfil what was clearly their public service. To make matters worse, the government's own weakness and inconsistency in dealing with the minors made possible the subterfuge and the resulting victory. The chamberlains for many years to come could claim no better principle of action than the smug philosophy of Croaker in *The Good Natured Man:* "When I 'm determined," he says, "I always listen to reason, because it can then do no harm."

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[1] See Nicholson, pp. 192 ff., for an extended account of these proceedings. They were published in full in the *London Chronicle*, March 17 and 20, 1810. A pamphlet also was issued reporting the affair.

The minors did not long delay action. Since their object was to present the spoken drama, and since the law insisted that they give only "burlettas," very clearly then, the term "burletta" must be so extended as to include the spoken drama. But how? Long usage had made its meaning clear. Dancing, pantomime, and music, without spoken dialogue, both in popular acceptation and in legal procedure, constituted a "burletta." Nowhere, however, did this term or its definition appear in any statute. Nicholson adduces two unofficial definitions, which clearly enough establish the legal acceptation of the word. One is on the authority of a manager and playwright, Colman the younger, who pronounced a "burletta" to be "a drama in rhyme which is entirely musical; a short piece of recitation and singing, wholly accompanied more or less by the orchestra." [1] The other, more authoritative, Nicholson quotes from a letter written by a deputy lord chamberlain to the Earl of Dartmouth in 1809. The letter describes "burlettas" as "strict musical pieces without dialogue." [2]

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[1] *Random Records*, i, 46–56, quoted by Nicholson, p. 282.

[2] Nicholson, p. 284.

Realizing the lack of a definite legal definition of the term, and, what is more, the utter impossibility of such a definition as would provide against evasion, Elliston, the first minor manager to pursue the new method of attack, made a most sensational departure from the earlier minor practice. This he did even before the Third Theatre action had been taken in 1809. He rented a Surrey house, called the Royal Circus, but later known as the Surrey, which hitherto had been used for a riding school and for equestrian displays. Here he audaciously presented, under the title of "burletta," *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, and *Macbeth.* This venture was not, after all, so much of an advance as it would seem. Elliston took good care that these pieces should conform to the "burletta" interpretation of the law. What the orthodox "burletta" at this time was, we may learn from specimens preserved for us in two volumes published by Cross, also a Surrey manager. Of these *Sir Francis Drake*, *The Cloud King*, and *Rinaldo* are fair representatives. They consist almost wholly of dumb-show, song, and brief passages of dialogue evidently meant to be chanted as recitative to musical accompaniment. No doubt this practice of speaking dialogue to a musical accompaniment was one of long standing at the minor houses. Possibly it had been suggested by melodrama, which term, in the eyes of the law, came to be almost synonymous with the term "burletta." After 1802, when the melodrama of the boulevards was first heard in London, almost all "burlettas" that were not strictly burlesques took the form of melodramas, especially those of an equestrian or spectacular nature. Upon this well-established practice Elliston hit as a means to evade the monopoly. It must not be supposed, therefore, that Elliston's performances were in the least like those of the legitimate stage. Their real character may be judged from the following account of his production of the *Honeymoon* in 1812. Perhaps the *Theatrical Inquisitor*, in which this description occurred, was somewhat prejudiced against Elliston because of his desertion of the legitimate stage, for it persisted in attacking his Surrey enterprise. The important point is, however, that it clearly establishes the kind of treatment given to these "legitimate" pieces when they were produced as "burlettas."

> When at length the curtain drew up, and we did witness it — heaven forgive us — but we expected every minute to behold the honored shade of Tobin arise and "grin horribly a ghastly smile" at them for their buffoonery. Why will Mr. Elliston, who has a mind to admire, and a soul to appreciate the beauty of such flowers in the dramatic parterre as the *Honeymoon;* why will he suffer them to be torn from their native beds and *sullied and polluted by the rude hands of such doggerel versifiers as Mr. Lawler?* What verse can he form superior to Tobin's blank verse? Let us have no more of this illegitimate species of the drama; but let this theatre, as it did in the time of Cross, present us with its proper produce — ballets of action and pantomimes.[1]

More light is thrown on the character of these performances by an indignant reply to this stricture, professing to come from a transpontine patron of the Surrey.

> Very few of them [patrons of the Surrey] will agree . . . in wishing to see that theatre again reduced to the state it was in under the management of Mr. Cross. I can assure you, sir, that the inhabitants on the Surrey side of the water consider themselves much obliged to Mr. Elliston for what they consider the improvements he has made, and indeed so close is he upon the heels of the legitimate stage, that in spite of *the tinkling of the piano and the jingle of the rhyme*, I can often fancy myself sitting in one of the winter theatres. . . . *His scenery and stage properties are equal to those of any establishment.*[2]

From these statements it is clear, at least, that Elliston's "burlettas" were a doggerel rewriting of the original plays, accompanied by a tinkling piano, and presented with much more care in scenery and costume than was usual at this time on the "illegitimate" stages. Even Sheridan, whose field Elliston was invading, declared that he had done greater violence to Shakespeare than to the law.

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[1] *Theat. Inquis.*, Sept., 1812, p. 54.

[2] *Ibid.*, Oct., 1812. The italics are mine.

Making no great claims, then, for the dramatic excellence of Elliston's innovation, we may be certain that it was an advance upon the Cross type of spectacle and dumb-show, previously to be seen at the minor houses. What these were like on the stage we may judge from the following description by Moncrieff, who, perhaps, more than anyone but Elliston, was responsible for the next step in illegitimacy. I know of nothing as yet published so explicit on this subject. Moncrieff recognizes three distinct stages in the development of the "burletta": the spectacle type, which we may suppose to have prevailed before Elliston's venture; the doggerel type, which apparently was the result of Elliston's work; and, finally, the more pretentious type of Moncrieff's own *Rochester*, which appeared in 1818. The first of these types he described as "inexplicable pieces of dumb-show" and

> unutterable *morceaux*, which went under the name of spectacles, and of which the *Black Cat* and the *Blood Red Knight* were memorable specimens.[1] All that could not be rendered clear by action was told by means of what were called "scrolls"—the pieces of linen on which, whatever the *Dramatis Personæ* wished to communicate to each other, for the better understanding of the audience, was expressed in writing, painted on cloth, and which the performers alternately fetched from the different sides of the stage, and presented to the full view of the public, who might then literally have been the reading public and not infrequently the spelling public. . . . As many as from 10 to 12 pieces of the best Irish linen had to

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[1] Since these plays were given as late as 1817 at Astley's, it is evident that the Elliston type of "burletta" did not wholly replace the earlier, but continued side by side with it.

be cut up in furnishing these scrolls on the production of every new piece.[1]

The allusion to spelling was occasioned by such morsels as the irate father's command, "Lead her to the Bridle Haltar," the pirate's "Blow up the Courser's Aunt" (Corsair's Haunt), or the appellation "Highman" for the familiar Turkish *Imam.*

Elliston's improvements probably supplanted this type of entertainment in all but the lowest minor houses, and those where, as at Sadler's Wells and Astley's, the productions were chiefly spectacular and equestrian. Moncrieff testifies to this fact in the same account cited above, for he remarks: "Before *Rochester* was brought out [1818], the dramas of the minor stage had been chiefly 'burlettas' in doggerel rhyme, played to the tinkling accompaniment of a pianoforte"; and he acknowledges that these productions "wretched as they were, were an infinitely great improvement in their way on the inexplicable pieces of dumb-show, that, in turn had preceded them." [1]

From 1809 to 1818 the only question to be raised about a "burletta" concerned the amount of music that must accompany the speaking of the doggerel verse. There was apparently no definite change made in this respect, but probably the "tinkling piano" became less and less audible, and its chords less frequent, as time went on. Sir William Brougham testified to the parliamentary committee, in 1832, that to his knowledge *Othello* had been performed as a "burletta," with an accompaniment that consisted of chords struck on a piano *every five minutes*, and quite inaudible at that.[2] In 1813 the *Theatrical Inquisitor* refers to operas licensed at the Pantheon Theatre in which the dialogues were "accompanied by the touch of a single string on the piano," and asks "how long this evasion will be allowed." Probably before 1817, however, much more piano was to be heard in the dialogue of regular "burlettas," and the doggerel of the dialogue was perhaps given in a sing-song fashion. If managers went too far, the ever-vigilant majors would hale them before the courts, as was the case in 1820, when Glossop, manager of the Coburg, was prosecuted for performing *Richard III* as a melodrama, from what was essentially Shakespeare's text with only "a musical instrument, not audible beyond the orchestra . . . slightly touched, apparently for the purpose of accompanying the play." [1]

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[1] Moncrieff's important testimony has, I believe, been previously overlooked. It is to be found in the introduction to the editions of *Rochester* and *Tom and Jerry* in Richardson's "Minor Drama," published in 1828.

[2] Report of the Select Committee. See p. 21, n. 1.

In most respects, however, the minors had improved greatly before the year 1818. In 1813 the *Theatrical Inquisitor* remarks:

> It is certainly an indication of the improving taste of the theatrical world, especially among the middling class, to find the rage for pantomime and buffoonery declining, and the preference evidently inclining to dramatic dialogue. This is obvious from a view of all the minor theatres, from many of which dumb action is entirely banished, where performances are to be witnessed little inferior to some of the regular theatres . . . their mode of performance being a mere evasion of law.[2]

In the following year the *Inquisitor* again praises the minors for their progress, especially the Sans Pareil. One of the "burlettas" [3] at this house, it believes, if acted at a major theatre, would have placed its authoress "in the first class of our modern authors." [4] The Pantheon, or Royalty, where only opera and dancing were allowed, the *Inquisitor* follows with an attention "commensurate to the importance of an establishment of a wealthy and numerous population."[1] In 1815 this distant theatre is described as rapidly "rising from obscurity." The Surrey and the Olympic were the houses that attracted most attention, however, and made the greatest progress toward the "legitimate drama."

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[1] *Theat. Inquis.*, xvi, 68, Feb., 1820.

[2] *Ibid.*, Nov., 1813, p. 198.

[3] *Whackam and Windham*, by Miss Scott.

[4] *Theat. Inquis.*, Feb., 1814, p. 128.

In the year 1816–17 several events at these minor houses showed how far they had progressed beyond the Cross type of drama. At this time Dibdin was manager of the Surrey, which had been abandoned by Elliston when he had crossed the river to assume the management of the Olympic in 1813–14. Elliston was still proprietor of the Olympic. In 1819 Dibdin at the Surrey made bold to produce an original tragedy in blank verse, Milman's *Fazio*.[2] It was stopped at once by an indignant protest and prosecution from the majors. No objection, however, was made when, in that same year, Dibdin mounted *The Vicar of Wakefield*, in an arrangement of his own, which the *Inquisitor* praised for its skill. The scenic effects and the acting were also praised, especially that of the burning cottage, in which "Mr. Huntly supported the venerable clergyman with great energy and obtained the warmest applause." The critic declared that the house had risen to "eminence in the scale of respectability," and he regretted that "the good old Vicar is forced to sing in order to evade the watchfulness of the Proprietors of the two patent theatres."[3]

Elliston at the Olympic had gone even further. In May of the previous year he had put on a piece by Moncrieff, which that writer declares to have been one of the first original pieces making any pretension to literary merit to be performed without protest at the minor theatres. It was described as "a petit comedy in one act." Of this and a farce called *All at Coventry*, given at the same time, the *Inquisitor* remarks:

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[1] *Theat. Inquis.*, Oct., 1813.

[2] Baker is mistaken when he attributes this venture to Elliston (p. 256).

[3] *Theat. Inquis.*, Sept. and Oct., 1817, pp. 237, 287.

> These two pieces are far superior to half of those which are produced at the regular theatres. . . . If the managers of the great houses have turned humour and common sense out of doors to make room for rope-dancing and tumbling, the managers of the minor houses have hospitably received and encouraged them. It is evident that the exhibitions at these theatres are every hour approaching nearer to the standard of the regular drama.[1]

Encouraged by this and other successes, Elliston in 1818 exceeded all his previous efforts in the production of Moncrieff's *Rochester*, which the author, in the preface to the 1828 edition, described as "the first original piece produced on the minor stage, claiming any pretensions to the rank of a regular drama." The *Inquisitor* seemed to confirm this statement, for it declares: "Had not the limits of Mr. Elliston's license confined the author of this piece, it might well have aspired to the rank of a comedy." Furthermore, Elliston had engaged a company superior to any hitherto known at a minor theatre. Besides the lessee himself,[2] — and it must be remembered that he was the best light comedian of his day on any stage, — there were the excellent actress, Mrs. Edwin, and the low comedian Sloman, whose work was greatly admired, and two singers of repute, Pearman and Miss Tunstal. The rest of the company were adequate. The *Inquisitor* reported that "never did any performance appear more to delight an audience."

By 1818, then, we find the unwritten "burletta" rule stretched to include what was practically a prose comedy, acted by the leading comedian of his times, and given with a brilliancy that made it one of the outstanding dramatic events of the year. We are told that the fashionable world flocked to see it. Of the old type of "burletta" only the musical accompaniment and a few songs in each act remained. Probably at about this time, therefore, the chamberlain began the practice of considering the essential requirement for a "burletta" the presence of at least five songs to an act.[1] Furthermore, the restriction of "burlettas" to three acts served as another means of distinction. That this ruling became firmly established appears from the following statement in a letter from Douglas Jerrold to Serle as late as 1835. "The system," he complained, "which has flung the dramatic muse under horses' hoofs turning every well-considered and elaborate attempt at stage literature to the confusion of its projectors — compelled me, in the present instance, to forgo my first plan of five acts and to adopt that of two."[2] Macready, before the Committee of Parliament in 1832, considered the number of acts the principal distinction, for he declared: "I know no other way than by taking what has been the rule hitherto, by appropriating the five-act plays as belonging to the large theatres." After 1830 the song regulation was often disregarded in the performance; for Jerrold remarks in the letter just quoted, "His lordship [lord chamberlain] says that there shall be six songs [the number usually mentioned was five] in each act of a 'burletta,' and the due number are constantly sent to the deputy licenser . . . who pockets the fee with full conviction that in five out of six instances not one of the songs will be retained, but were merely sent to cheat the Lord Chamberlain!"

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[1] *Theat. Inquis.*, xiii, 468, Dec., 1818.

[2] Baker implies that Elliston appeared for the first time in his own theatre (p. 256). This was probably not so, for the *Inquisitor* repeatedly remarked that his acting on the major stage had grown coarse because of his work at the minors.

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[1] Nicholson apparently overlooks this practice, therefore coming to the wrong conclusion that there was by 1832 no real difference between the major and minor art, except the piano travesty.

[2] Dedication of his comedy, *Schoolfellows*, produced at the Queen's, Feb. 17, 1835.

Liberal as the application of the "burletta" rule had been, it is a mistake to assert, as Nicholson does, that by 1833 "the mystery attaching to burletta was dispelled," and that "it became indistinguishable from the drama." [1] Although, perhaps, in a few cases of flagrant violation, such a statement might apply, the three main requirements of the later "burletta" ruling technically held good: namely, the restriction to three acts, the singing of five songs in each act, and the sounding throughout of a musical accompaniment. The definition that Nicholson cites from the *Morning Chronicle*, and upon which chiefly he bases his assertion, was written as late as 1837, and was intended to be facetious. "A burletta," it stated, was a "drama with amusing plot, sprightly dialogue, light sketchy characters, without any music."[2] That this could not have been considered a safe definition before 1843 is clearly shown, not only by the general practice of the better minor managements, but also by direct testimony. Planché, for instance, the best known of the "burletta" authors, writes that after 1843 "it was no longer necessary, in order to avoid prosecution, for a piano to be kept tinkling throughout the presentation of a tragedy or a comedy, nor compulsory that there should be at least five pieces of vocal music in each act of a drama produced at the Lyceum." [3]

More convincing yet was the surprise of the *Theatrical Observer*, which, since 1821, had followed every dramatic performance of any note, at the boldness in 1836 of Mark Lemon's *Arnold Winkelried*, produced at the Surrey. "Monday last," the *Observer* wrote, "will form quite an epoch in theatrical affairs, for on that night a legitimate drama (a new tragedy) was produced on these boards at an illegitimate theatre with a most brilliant and triumphant success." In 1838 the *Era*, in an editorial reviewing the minor drama, complained that an attempt was still kept up to restrict the type of performance, and expressed the belief that it would be more to the point to restrict the number of the minor theatres. Before 1843 there can be no doubt that by far the most common types of minor pieces were burlesques, extravaganzas, revues, fairy plays, melodramas without literary pretensions, vaudevilles, farces, and comediettas.

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[1] Nicholson, p. 285.

[2] Cited, Id., p. 285, from *Morning Chronicle*, Nov. 29, 1837.

[3] *Recollections and Reflections*, ii, 107.

Many instances, it is true, may be cited to show that the authorities were not always vigilant. For instance, in 1818 Junius Booth presented Shakespeare at the Coburg, but the management was fined. In 1822 *The Belle's Stratagem* was given at the Queen's. In 1827 Elliston, having returned to the Surrey, presented *Henry IV* and *Pizarro*. Another amusing instance more often cited was that of Edmund Kean appearing at the City Theatre in 1831. The patentees at once started proceedings against the manager, Chapman, but it happened that Kean, while still acting for him, gave his services at a Drury Lane benefit. Wallack, the manager, inadvertently allowed the following explanation to appear on his playbill: "By permission of John Kemble Chapman, Esq., of the City Theatre, Mr. Kean for this night only!"

It must not be thought, however, that such cases were frequent, or by any means the rule. Most of them ended in prosecution and failure, as did the whole enterprise at the Strand Theatre, when its management attempted to operate without a license. If tolerated, such violations were generally at theatres too remote from the majors to attract attention. As late as 1842, the chamberlain and the courts would probably have sustained the patentees in action taken against offending minor managers for flagrant violation of the established rules.

I have gone to some pains to establish this point, at the risk of tedium, because of the general assumption that the monopoly, by 1843, had long been a dead letter and that, therefore, it was not in the least to be blamed for the trend of dramatic affairs during the decade from 1830 to 1840. It is certain, at least, that all of those who during these years might have accomplished far more for the drama under free conditions, considered themselves bound absolutely by the monopoly restrictions. Such were Macready, who repeatedly expressed the desire to play in a small theatre; Jerrold, who considered himself condemned by monopoly conditions to depend upon the minor drama for success; Planché, who was obliged to translate and adapt from the French only such pieces as the law would allow at the Olympic and other minor houses; and, more important than all others, Vestris and Mathews, who were ambitious to develop a new type of comedy, but who were limited to "burlettas" at the Olympic, and who, like Macready, failed when they attempted to manage Covent Garden. It was, therefore, far from true, as Nicholson states, that in 1833 "the mystery attaching to burletta was dispelled," and that "it had become indistinguishable from the drama."

The complaint was by no means one-sided. If the minors stole from the majors, the majors helped themselves even more liberally to the kinds of drama that were properly the possession of the minors. We have already noted this disposition as a consequence of the enlargement of the patent theatres in 1791 and 1794. Spectacles, ballets, animal shows, burlesques, and acrobats became the rage as afterpieces, and melodramas not infrequently usurped the place of legitimate tragedy as the chief attraction of a more pretentious nature. The worst of this pilfering was that, while the patentees could prosecute the minors for their offences, the minors had no redress whatever for the depredations committed by the majors. No fact helped the minors more than this injustice in winning the sympathy of the populace and of the critics. It was no less a personage than John Philip Kemble who in 1811 completed the desecration of the majors by filching from the minors even their equestrian shows. No wonder the *Dramatic Censor* exclaimed: "This evening should be considered as a black epoch forever!" This was, however, only a beginning. Let us see how the accounts stood twenty years later.

> At the theatre royal, Drury Lane [the *Observer* grumbled], we have *Timour the Tartar* and the horses. At the theatre royal, Covent Garden, we have the *Life and Death of Buonaparte*, as a mere spectacle accompanied by every kind of catch-shilling gew-gaw, and some horses; while, on the other hand, we find at Sadler's Wells, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Katharine and Petruchio;* at the Surrey, *Richard III*, several other of Shakespeare's plays and Cumberland's *Jew*, with Elliston; and finally, at the new City Theatre in Milton Street (alias Grub) the *Merchant of Venice;* Shylock, Mr. Kean!!![1]

Let me once more guard against sweeping conclusions based upon such statements when applied to the minor houses. It would seem from this paragraph that any minor theatre might present the legitimate drama in 1831 with perfect immunity. We need to remember, as we read, that Chapman at the City Theatre was fined for his bravado, and that Sadler's Wells and the Surrey were too far from the theatrical centre to give the major proprietors much concern. Nor does it appear that even these remote theatres, except, perhaps, the Surrey under Elliston's last management, persisted in such violations. The testimony of the *Observer* in this case is more reliable as an indication of the depths to which the major houses had fallen, than of the heights attained by the minors. The humor in the relationship between the majors and the minors at this time is charmingly brought out by one of Planché's *revues* called the *Drama's Levée*, given before 1830.

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, May 26, 1831, no. 2946.

At the opening of this sketch, *Drama*, an old woman, is overcome by the sad plight to which the quarrels of her two children, Legitimate Drama and Illegitimate Drama, have reduced her. She first remonstrates with Legitimate Drama:

Drama

You naughty boy! When I 'm so very poorly;
You have been fighting with your brother surely.

Legitimate Drama

I have; because of him I can't get fed,
Whilst he is almost sick of gingerbread.

Drama

Will you ne'er cease this ruinous debate?
Where 's that audacious Illegitimate?

Enter Illegitimate Drama in a dress half-harlequin and half-melodramatic.

Illegitimate Drama

Behold! (*Striking an attitude.*)

Drama

Unnatural son.

Illegitimate Drama

Is 't thus I 'm styled?
I always thought I was your natural child.

Legitimate Drama

He puns! He 'll pick a pocket the next minute.

Illegitimate Drama

I 'll not pick yours, because there 's nothing in it.

Legitimate Drama

That is because you robbed me long ago.

Illegitimate Drama

Come, who began to rob, I 'd like to know?
When I was quite a child in leading string
Before I 'd learnt to speak or anything

But dance my dolls to music, did n't you
Begin to vow they were your playthings too?
Stole from the nursery of my best hopes,
My rocking horses and my skipping ropes,
And took my harlequins from loss to save you,
And now you blame the *punches* that I gave you.

Thereupon old Drama in utter perplexity cries:

They so confound me that though I 'm their mother,
I vow I sometimes can't tell one from t'other.
I 'm half distracted with the horrid din.

By 1832, then, it was clear that something ought to be done to end this "tragical-comical-historical" perversion of good sense. At this time the friends of the drama, whether they sympathized with the majors or with the minors, made a great effort to blot out the disgrace. The excitement was started by a petition laid before the king by the composer Arnold, to rebuild his English opera house, which was burned in 1830. Previously he had been allowed privileges similar to those of the Haymarket Theatre, namely, to give performances during the summer months only. In his present petition, he asked for an extension of this license to include a part of the winter. The king brought the matter before the lord chancellor's court. An extension of two months was granted, and later, one of four months. In this way a new means of encroachment upon the major houses began. The Haymarket Theatre was not long in following the example; its season was similarly extended to eight months, and in 1840 to ten months.[1] This result, however, was insignificant in comparison with the light it threw upon the patents. A legal investigation, far more acute than that attending the Third Theatre Petition, was made as to the validity of these documents. The solicitor-general proved beyond doubt that they were worthless, for, as he contended, in 1682 they had been merged, and by this action had become legally inoperative. He showed that they created no monopoly, because, as he proved, William III had granted a license to Betterton. Besides, one of the letters patent had actually been surrendered to Queen Anne in return for a license. Thus it was shown that what poor Sheridan had paid twenty thousand pounds for in 1793 was not worth a farthing!

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[1] The history of the summer privileges is a complicated one, and hardly essential to our study. To make amends for a practical joke that had cost Samuel Foote his leg, the Duke of York secured him a license for life to give all types of drama from May 15 to Sept. 15. These rights were enjoyed also by his successor Colman. In 1810 similar privileges were extended to S. J. Arnold for an English opera house. This arrangement was agreeable to the majors, for without rivalry it afforded their performers employment during the summer months. The summer theatres, however, had difficulty in keeping open

The majors had one claim yet, and upon this they propped their waning hopes until 1843. They could plead with justice that historically the theatrical monopoly had been recognized, and that upon this recognition their property rights were based. In fairness to their creditors the monopoly must be continued. Upon the force of this argument — although continuous failure visited these establishments in the meantime — the monopoly was allowed to drag on until 1843.

Every effort, however, was made by those who had the interests of the drama at heart, to put an end to the monopoly. Even the unfortunate and downtrodden writers for the stage came forward in the agitation that Arnold's petition had stirred up. They met under the leadership of Serle, at the Albion Tavern opposite Drury Lane Theatre, on December 4, 1831, and drew up a memorial to be presented to the king. A second meeting, with Bulwer-Lytton in the chair, was held February 24, 1832, at the City of London Tavern. A petition to Parliament was the result. This action was based chiefly upon two pamphlets

the allotted four months because of the early opening of the patent houses; but in 1822 a truce was made whereby they were allowed four months each year without competition with the majors. This agreement lasted until the changes mentioned above were brought about.

by T. J. Thackeray, which had been widely circulated in that year. One was entitled *Theatrical Emancipation* and the other, *The Rights of Dramatic Authors*. Admirably thorough was his study of the dramatic conditions, not only in England, but also on the Continent, especially in France and Belgium. He showed that England was shamefully behind, not only in the matter of theatrical monopoly, but also in regard to authorship rights, such as production guaranties and copyrights.

The upshot of all this movement was Bulwer-Lytton's Dramatic Performance bill which, in turn, followed upon the work of the Select Committee of Parliament, whose report, presented August 2, 1832, I have already quoted. This made it clear that the only hope for improved dramatic conditions lay in the freeing of the theatres, and in a reasonable and consistent method of licensing theatrical performances. The bill embodied these measures. It passed the House of Commons, but was defeated by the Lords on August 2, 1833. The failure of this important and valuable bill was due in part to the consideration of property rights which appeared to depend upon the monopoly. It is not by any means certain, however, that at this time the property of the majors did not actually suffer from the monopoly. By the obligations the monopoly imposed upon them, they were forced, however wretchedly, to present a kind of drama for which they were not in the least adapted. No manager, from 1826 to the freeing of the theatres, made the monopoly theatres pay, and what money was gained seems to have come rather from the circus part of the program than from the legitimate drama. Even Macready's best efforts failed, and in relinquishing his management in 1843, he declared that the drama under monopoly conditions could not succeed.[1]

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[1] The passage of this address reprinted in the *Diaries* of Macready from the *Times* does not contain the reference to the monopoly. For this see the address given in full in *Theat. Obs.*, June 15, 1843, no. 6701.

The failure of Bulwer's bill was, however, generally attributed to a fanatical speech delivered by the Bishop of London, inveighing against the theatres in general as indecent and immoral, and upholding the monopoly merely because he saw in it the only means of restricting them. As a result of its abolition he pictured the city filled with dens of vice parading as theatres. The utter absurdity of his argument was clearly proved when, in 1843, the monopoly was at last abolished, for not a single additional theatre was built in the city for twenty years. If, as he claimed, the theatres exerted a debasing influence, he failed to prove the fact to the satisfaction of any friend of the drama. Besides, in contributing to the defeat of the bill, he acted in a manner best calculated to keep the theatres in a state of degradation. He deserves to be stigmatized as an arch-offender among the well-meaning but wholly uninformed enemies of dramatic entertainment who, instead of aiding those who are working for the uplift of this influential art, undertake the Quixotic course of suppression, or — more irrational yet — that of contemptuous neglect.

In bitterness of heart the workers for the drama gave up the fight. But the success of their cause was inevitable. In 1835 Lord Conyngham, who, like Dartmouth of earlier years, sympathized with the minors and regarded the Licensing Act as a means to extend rather than limit theatrical enterprise, proceeded to grant licenses to minor houses with a lavish hand. One was accorded to the Strand, which for many years had existed without one, and which, therefore, had been a storm centre of prosecution and evasion. The Adelphi and the Olympic were allowed to extend their seasons. One new theatre, the St. James's, was erected. Conyngham's example was followed by the magistrates having jurisdiction outside of Westminster, and within ten years six new theatres were opened. Not only did Conyngham encourage the minor houses, but he seems almost deliberately to have attacked the majors. He limited them to spoken dialogue in their performances, and he forced them to observe Lent, although the minors operating under the magistrates' licenses were not obliged to do so. At last, the majors found themselves actually suffering as a result of their cherished monopoly, and they soon became as loud as the minors in their cry for liberty and justice.

In 1843 the inevitable occurred. The Theatre Regulation Act, granting freedom of the theatres, was passed almost without a dissenting voice. It received the royal sanction on August 22 of that year. It has often been asserted that the passing of the monopoly had no appreciable effect upon the history of the drama in London. Such statements may be understood in two senses. They may mean that the Theatre Regulation Act merely recognized a state of affairs already existing, or they may imply that the passing of established monopoly rights in general had no effect on the progress of dramatic art. Nicholson [1] maintains the former position, and Archer appears to support the latter.[2] I believe that neither justly represents the facts.

If it is true that the law merely confirmed a state of freedom already existing, why should there have been so much agitation for its enactment? It had been clearly established in 1831 that the patents were worthless,[3] and the licensing acts made no reference whatever to monopoly conditions. If a state of dramatic freedom had been brought about by 1843, there was surely no need for further legislation, for there was not so much as a dead letter regarding monopoly on the statute books. The monopoly still existed, in fact as well as theory, by reason of historical recognition. Even Conyngham maintained the

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[1] In *The Struggle for a Free Stage.*

[2] In the review of the Victorian stage given in Ward's *Reign of Victoria.*

[3] See p. 46.

"burletta" restriction, and Macready, who would have been among the first to take refuge in the small theatres, declared as late as the summer of 1843 that the law would not allow him to do so.[1] Similarly, Vestris and Mathews at their Olympic Theatre had never been at liberty to present plays that were not strictly of the "illegitimate" type, and had therefore ventured upon the ruinous management of Covent Garden, where they hoped to realize their ambition of creating a genuine English comedy. *London Assurance* was the result, but remained almost the only result, because of the difficulties encountered in the major houses. Similarly, the Yates management at the Adelphi limited its productions almost entirely to melodramas, to meet the chamberlain's requirements. Since these two theatres, the Olympic and the Adelphi, were by far the most important of the minors from 1832 until the freeing of the theatres, the attitude of reverence for the monopoly requirements at these houses was highly significant. We know from Planché's testimony that Vestris and Mathews also considered themselves so restricted at the Olympic.[2] More significant still is the fact that, after the abolition of the monopoly, several small theatres that had previously been unimportant came to the front with the presentation of legitimate drama, which abandoned the great patent theatres almost entirely. The most notable of these managements were those of Phelps and Charles Kean, one at Sadler's Wells and the other at The Princess's. Hardly less important was that of Madame Vestris and Mathews at the Lyceum. Surely it was the freeing of the theatres that made possible the work of Fechter, Boucicault, and the Bancrofts, all of which would have been utterly unthinkable during the last decade of the theatrical monopoly.

Whatever grounds there may be for supposing the monopoly to have been moribund before its legal demise, surely there is no ground for the assertion that the passing of the monopoly as an institution made no difference in the trend of dramatic history. It is true that during the decade immediately following the free theatre enactment no marvels of dramatic art appeared on the London stages. If anything, for several years, the conditions of the drama seemed worse than ever. The great patent theatres, if they had the good fortune to be opened at all, were abandoned to spectacles, animals, and music. Many regarded this fact, in itself, as the passing of England's dramatic glory. Such, in part, was the feeling behind the demonstration in Drury Lane against the French company acting there in 1848.[1]

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[1] See p. 47, n. 1.

[2] See p. 40, n. 3.

When it was asked if any successes at the small theatres made up for this loss, only the Haymarket, during the first years of the free stage, gave any reassuring promise; and this theatre, which had always been the summer home of the legitimate drama, had already been allowed, during the last two years of the monopoly, a season of ten months. Except for this already successful and celebrated house, only failure and wretchedness were to be found among the minors. Houses like the Olympic and the Adelphi, which had built up a clientage for the old "illegitimate" types of burlesque and melodrama, did not dare to venture upon the uncertain field of the "legitimate." Even in their own field these houses no longer were successful as in the days of Vestris and the Yates family. Still more significant was the fiasco at the Lyceum, where a young amateur actor, Captain Harvey, attempted to reap the benefit of the free theatre law. Immediately, in 1844, he opened with performances of Shakespeare. After his blighting failure there could be no doubt in anyone's mind that something more than a legal enactment was necessary to dramatic success. Instead, then, of a rapid spread of small houses which the lovers of the drama had looked forward to with joy, and which the Bishop of London had predicted with horror, only one house was built from 1841 to 1866, and that, the New Standard, in a remote part of the city, played no appreciable part in dramatic affairs. Natural enough, therefore, was the general opinion that the freedom of the stage was no great boon after all. It is less excusable for us to make this mistake to-day.

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[1] See pp. 16 ff.

The truth is, I believe, that a city which had for nearly two centuries become accustomed to monopoly conditions could not adjust itself without difficulty to the new freedom. To take liberty with the familiar text, there was no use in putting old wine into new bottles, especially since the public had already tired of its quality. Something fresh was needed to take advantage of the new opportunity, and that something fresh was not quickly to be created, although its creation was now assured. In later chapters we shall follow the development of this new organism, which in 1843 was still embryonic. It had been conceived even during the monopoly conditions, but it was to abide the development of two decades before it could come forth and take its place in the line of dramatic succession.

No one, at this time, at least, had any clear idea as to what the new art was to be. *London Assurance* at Covent Garden in 1841 and Bulwer's *Money* at the Haymarket in 1840 had given the first intimation of it, but in both of these plays there was still more of the old than of the new; and great as the novelty and success of these productions was, they were only the first marked steps toward the new goal. They indicated the end of the past rather than the beginning of the future. Do as well as Boucicault and Douglas Jerrold might, they were never able to achieve another similar success with the comedy material then available. Creative vitality was still lacking, although many of the externals of a new art were present.

Two decades of stagnation in theatre-building, which are often cited as a proof that the passing of monopoly made no difference, were not an indication of the inefficacy of free theatres, any more than the failure of managements had been. At the time the monopoly was abolished there were already many more theatres in London than the scanty interest in any form of drama warranted. In the fifteen years previous to the fall of the monopoly, sixteen theatres had been built. Seven of these had already disappeared before 1843. They had been built by speculators who, like the proprietors of the Strand, hoped to evade the monopoly, or who believed that the new day was dawning, and wanted to be the first to bask in its sun. The leniency of Conyngham and the magistrates in granting licenses had created false hopes. Only three of the fifteen houses built between 1829 and 1840 played an important part in subsequent stage history;[1] and of the twenty-one existing in 1843 not more than half could be considered in any sense prosperous. The *Era* was correct in its first editorials dealing with dramatic affairs, when it declared, in 1838, that the first step toward dramatic betterment should be to limit the number of theatres.[2] No wonder, then, that there was no theatre-building as a result of free theatres. What was to be expected, however, and what actually occurred, was the resurrection of no small number of these houses that previously had failed completely, or had been the resort of low audiences and wretched art, to a condition of prosperity and respect. That such was the case there can be no denial. If this process was slower than the friends of the stage had anticipated, it was, nevertheless certain, and the results were of lasting importance. It is surprising, indeed, that so much advance can be clearly attributed to the freeing of the theatres within the first six years of the enactment. In

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[1] The Strand, the St. James's, and the Princess's. See the diagram, p. 58.

[2] See p. 41.

1844, Sadler's Wells, one of the lowest theatres in the city, became the scene of a Shakespearean revival such as it would be difficult to parallel in the whole history of the stage. In 1847 the Lyceum, which had hitherto gone from failure to failure as an opera house, became the scene of Vestris and Mathew's last brilliant endeavors to give London a respectable comic art. The Princess's, which hitherto had hardly been heard of, became in 1850, in a very genuine sense, the theatre royal, where Charles Kean entertained the fashionable world with an extraordinary series of productions under more favorable conditions than had hitherto been known during the century. The Haymarket, and even the Olympic and the Adelphi, greatly extended their sphere of activity. Most wonderful of all, although somewhat later, the obscure and utterly contemptible Queen's Theatre became what Knight would consider the birthplace of modern English comedy.

When we review the immense strides made in the scenic art, in acting, and in all the commonplaces of the drama, as we shall do in the following chapters, we shall be more and more convinced that the passing of the monopoly was of the utmost importance to the future of the drama. I am not sure just what Archer meant to imply in the carefully guarded generality of his conclusion that "financially . . . free trade has more than justified itself; in other respects it has not, perhaps, worked all the wonders predicted by its champions."[1] The inference, however, which many might draw from this statement, that only in a financial way did the stage benefit by the passing of the monopoly, does not fairly represent the trend of later stage history.

The freeing of the theatres was no act of witchery. A body of dramatists was not instantly conjured into existence. The stage did not at once become a Utopia. Dramatists schooled in the old traditions were not ready for the new opportunity; and actors who had learned the trickery of legitimate acting on the huge monopoly stages, or of the illegitimate drama on the little stages, could hardly do better than continue these same practices after the theatres were freed, and until a new generation had brought with it a new spirit. The one glaring fact that faced the dramatist before 1843 was the lack of opportunity for serious experimentation. Art on the stage, as we shall have ample evidence in later chapters, had become as circumscribed and traditional as was that of the sculptors who chiselled for Amenhotep and Thutmes. Managers wanted only what was "safe," and this was invariably what was old, imitative, and conventional.

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[1] Ward's *Reign of Victoria*, ii, 563.

So long had this repressive spirit prevailed, that even before the monopoly was abolished, signs of revolt were everywhere in evidence. Vestris at the Olympic in 1831, and at Covent Garden in 1841, was among the first of the prophets. The production of *London Assurance* was her great achievement. In the poetic drama Browning and Westland Marston made similar attempts, but with less success. Jerrold, too, had struggled desperately to rise above his own odious fame as a writer of domestic melodramas. The total result, however, of all this early experimentation was but slight.

It was no wonder, then, that men like Jerrold, Planché, and Marston, who had already passed their period of experimentation before the theatres were freed, should have nothing new to give to the liberated stage. And yet many of their plays of forward-looking tendency received a favorable hearing which otherwise might not have been granted them. It was clear that a younger generation of workers must perform the new service for the free stage. All but Boucicault were as yet unheard of. Oxenford, Reade, Taylor, Byron, and Robertson were schoolboys. The great forces in the larger literary world had long before abandoned the stage, and were too busy now to turn back to it simply because a law had been passed. Even Dickens, who was most inclined to the practical stage among the non-dramatic writers, had been too much discouraged by Macready to continue his efforts at playwriting. Thackeray, too, had retreated after a feeble effort under the monopoly conditions. Browning had become both discouraged and disgusted with the treatment given his plays on the monopoly stages, and apparently he had no heart to make further efforts under the more favorable but still uncertain conditions. All things considered, the progress actually made during the next two decades was surprisingly great. A new French influence was imported and domesticated, a new taste in English audiences — and this no act of Parliament could effect — was created, a new mode of acting was cultivated, and at last a dramatist big enough to understand and master all of these tendencies was found. Was twenty years an extravagantly long period of time for this development? Even if the false standards and debased judgments fostered by the monopoly conditions had not militated against the rising generation of reformers, these young enthusiasts would have found twenty years none too long for their task.

Instead, then, of finding the two decades from 1843 to 1863 full of dull, meaningless confusion, which proved the fight for a free stage to have been in vain, we shall be interested in them as perhaps the most vital and significant of all the periods of the century. The very absence of the much-heralded and almost certain literary activity for the stage is not the least significant of the facts we have to consider. "French invasion," which is the excuse usually given to account for the inactivity of English writers, does not, I believe, tell the whole story. The more important fact was the struggle between new standards and old; between a dying régime, and a new, vigorous, independent, but untried and unskilled and unorganized band of workers. With a clearly defined, and almost perfected French art ready-made as a competitor, the English art was at a bewildering disadvantage, and the English workers almost hopelessly confused. No better indication of this state of mind could be desired than Boucicault's twenty years of experimentation in search of a vital dramatic medium. Hardly less suggestive is Robertson's shorter apprenticeship. Still more interesting and, I believe, more significant, were those innumerable changes which were taking place on the stage itself, quite apart from its literature, and which represented every phase of this interesting struggle between the old conventional school of the monopoly conditions and the new and infinitely vague tendencies of the free theatres. This very problem is at the heart of the present volume, and whatever value this study may have for the student of the drama will result from the light thrown upon this complicated stage development, not only as an isolated phenomenon, but even more, I hope, as a most significant example of the influence of the acted upon the written drama.

In such developments, then, is to be found the far-reaching effects of the monopoly, and, still more, of its abolition. If it is true — and no one would be bold enough to deny it — that Boucicault and Robertson, and the whole school of modern writers who have built more or less upon their foundations, have not "worked all the wonders predicted," it is still pertinent to ask, what would they have accomplished if monopoly conditions had continued? Robertson and Boucicault might have been counted before the law as "vagrants" and "sturdy beggars," and their theatres would certainly have been closed.

Chapter III

THE LONDON THEATRES

"THE full tide of human existence," said Dr. Johnson, "is at Charing Cross." The position of the London theatres was determined by this fact, as a glance at the map opposite page 58 will assure you. Twenty of the forty-two playhouses which at any time during the first half of the century were open to the public were situated within half a mile of that charmed spot. Of the thirteen really important houses, nine were within this radius; and the influence of these nine was greater than that of all the rest. With the exception of Sadler's Wells, the Surrey, the Queen's (later the Prince of Wales s), and the Princess's, none of the outlying theatres contributed significantly to dramatic history, and these were prominent only for short periods.

The two great monopoly houses, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, were situated within easy walking distance of Charing Cross. Of these, Drury Lane was the older and the more revered. It was the only London theatre that could boast a permanent name and site dating from the Restoration.[1] The Wren structure, considerably modified under Garrick, was replaced in 1793 by Sheridan's house, which was not very different from the present structure bearing the name. The new theatre was considerably larger than its predecessor, to correspond to the city's growth. Garrick's theatre had seated 2,000 spectators: Sheridan's accommodated 3,611.[1] It was provided with an iron curtain and a water-tank. There were eight boxes on each side of the pit, and two rows of boxes above them. Over these were two galleries, with benches at the back and boxes along the side. Boxes were also introduced at the side of the stage. Burned in 1809, with overwhelming loss to Sheridan, it was raised a second time, and more resplendent than ever, by its undaunted proprietors, in 1812.[2] Nine years later it was remodelled internally by Elliston. This theatre, with few changes, has continued to the present day. Until the fall of the monopoly in 1843, and even later, it was considered the proper home of tragedy. Kemble and Siddons had succeeded there to Garrick's tragic fame, and left it merely because of Sheridan's shiftless methods. Later, Edmund Kean and Macready maintained its preëminence through the rest of the monopoly period. Even later still, while Robertson and Boucicault were the rage, Phelps gathered around him the faithful and made one more stand at old Drury, only to be told that "Shakespeare spells ruin and Byron bankruptcy." The performance of Boucicault's *Formosa*, which in 1869 saved its manager from the Shakespeare and Byron calamity, marked its final surrender to "illegitimacy." Pantomimes, spectacles, and rousing melodramas are now meant by the term "Drury Lane pieces."[3] Shades of Kemble, Siddons, Kean, and Macready!

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[1] Even when it was first opened with a performance of *The Humorous Lieutenant*, April 8, 1663, it was far from contemptible. Its reconstruction in 1672, from plans by Christopher Wren, was still reminiscent of Elizabethan stage conditions, for the acting was done very largely on the huge oval platform extending into the audience room in front of the proscenium, leaving room, as in Shakespeare's day, for dandies to disport themselves at the sides of the stage. See account by Cibber, quoted by Baker, p. 49.

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[1] Baker, p. 91.

[2] The theatre built by Wren had cost £4,000; the house opened in 1812 had involved an expense of £400,000. Within ten years, however, it had been allowed to fall into such disrepair that Elliston, who abandoned his successes at the Olympic to assume the Drury Lane failure, was obliged in 1821 to spend £21,000 to restore it. He tried also to improve its acoustics, which in 1814 were so bad that the great Corinthian columns flanking the stage were removed. Elliston had the ceiling lowered and the boxes and galleries advanced. (*Theat. Obs.*, no. 291, 1822.) At the same time he increased the seating to accommodate 3,590, and he definitely removed the old stage doors.

[3] That its great size is not as unfavorable to a refined presentation of drama even in our realistic manner as has generally been assumed is made clear by Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson. *A Player under Three Reigns*, p. 298.

The "great rival" was Covent Garden.[1] Pantomime, spectacle, musical farces, and genuine comedy were its specialties. While Drury Lane put forth its best efforts to make all London weep, Covent Garden saw its easy opportunity to go one better and make all London laugh. But its spectacles often included tragedy, its musical farces appropriated Italian opera, and its genuine comedy often descended to burlesque and farce. Except for the period of John Kemble's management, from 1802 to 1817, it deserved its reputation for excellence in the lighter dramatic types, appropriate to the house where *She Stoops to Conquer* was produced.

Although in 1791 it was much enlarged, its capacity was less by 576 seats than that of Sheridan's Drury Lane. Before its destruction in 1808, it had given London two dramatic sensations: the introduction of technical French melodrama in 1802, and the rage for the child actor, Betty. We shall have more to say of melodrama later. Since, however, the appearance of Betty is almost unique in nineteenth-century stage annals, and since it is in no wise connected with the following study, we may, perhaps, indulge in a digression to record this extraordinary occurrence. In 1804 it was announced that a tragedian only thirteen years old, discovered in the provinces, would make his début on December 4. The interest of the London public was skilfully aroused by having the youth exhibited on the streets in a carriage, and in a box at the theatre itself. The reporters of the *Times* gave him space. A formidable audience was, therefore, in attendance to prove his metal in the rôle of Achmet in *Barbarossa*. If the public came to deride, it remained to applaud. All England, the universities and the Parliament included, joined

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[1] Previously known as the "Wandering Patentee," this theatre, under John Rich, in 1732 came into a permanent habitation and a name. Armed with both patents royal, Rich moved from Lincoln's Inn Fields and built in Covent Garden the house which in 1791 was replaced under the management of Harris by the more magnificent edifice that concerns us.

Betty as Young Norval in "Douglas"

From the original portrait by G. P. Harding, Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library

in the mad rush to pay honors to this well-trained stripling. Even Kemble and Siddons withdrew from the hopeless competition. This apparent madness has often been attributed to the depravity of popular taste. Betty's complete failure as a mature actor has favored this assumption. The phenomenon cannot, I think, be dismissed so easily. It was a recurrence of the craze for "eyases," who, as Shakespeare complained through *Hamlet*, were "proclaiming against their own succession." Hazlitt's *Table Talk* justifies æsthetically the popular taste. "Master Betty's acting," he wrote, "was a singular phenomenon, but it was as beautiful as it was singular. I saw him in the part of Douglas, and he seemed like 'some gay creature of the element,' moving about gracefully, with all the flexibility of youth, and murmuring Æolian sounds with plaintive tenderness. I never shall forget the way in which he repeated the line in which young Norval says, speaking of the fate of the two brothers —

> And in my mind happy was he that died.

The tones fell and seemed to linger prophetic in my ear. Perhaps the wonder was made greater than it was. Boys at that age can often read remarkably well, and certainly not without natural grace and sweetness of voice."

Betty's success tempted others. Leigh Hunt's first paper in the *News* enumerates nine such "infants" who, with less success, had made a public appeal. All, however, including Betty himself, were soon forgotten. Not before 1851, when P. T. Barnum at the St. James's brought forward the nine-year-old Bateman sisters in *Richard III*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth*, and *Bombastes Furioso*, was anything of the kind tried again in the London theatres. The Batemans were enjoyed, of course, merely because they were "cunning."

To return to Covent Garden. The sumptuous new theatre erected there after the fire of 1808, at a cost of

£150,000, and inaugurated by the O. P. riots[1] was exploited by Kemble with every attraction likely to regain popular favor. Four large companies, at a nightly expense of £300, were supported in order to present in the best possible manner tragedy, comedy, opera, and ballet. The management was, nevertheless, charged with the profanation of the monopoly rights because of its cavalcades, its tight-rope performers, and its spectacles without literature. The *Inquisitor* kept up a fire of contempt, of which the following was the first shot:

> [Covent Garden managers insult the public] by the exhibition of the vilest buffooneries, and then shift the weight of censure from themselves, by declaring that such trash is best suited to the taste of the British audience. . . . We promise to pursue them with unremitting acrimony week after week and month after month . . . till they give to the public that which the public has a right to demand.

The editor did not soon have reason to change his target.

Except for a brief period of pleasing comedy, with Charles Kemble and Helen Faucit, during the eighteen-twenties, and the débuts of O'Neill and Macready, there was little to distinguish "the great rival" before the theatrical débacle of 1833. In that year both Drury Lane and Covent Garden passed into the hands of the showman Bunn. For a last brilliant but brief period of dramatic glory, it revived under the management of Macready (1837–39) and that of Vestris and Mathews (1839–42). These managements will be considered at some length in later chapters on managing and acting. When the monopoly was finally abolished, Covent Garden passed out of the field of the legitimate drama into that of spectacle and opera. It was destroyed and rebuilt in 1858, very nearly in its present form, and it became the recognized home of foreign opera.

Next in rank to the monopoly houses, and often su-

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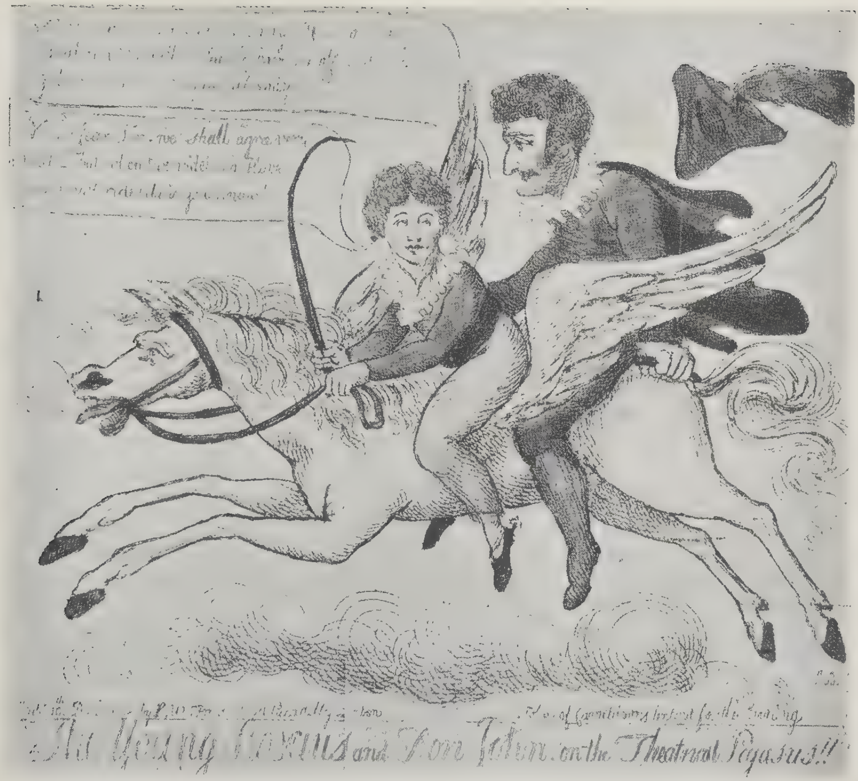
[1] See pp. 9 ff.

[2] *Theat. Inquis.*, Aug., 1814, pp. 117 ff.


The Young Roscius and Don John. on the Theatrical Pegasus!!

CARICATURE OF THE BETTY SENSATION

Kemble almost unseated on the theatrical Pegasus

perior to them in dramatic quality, was the "Little Theatre in the Haymarket"[1] as it was fondly called. Of all the London playhouses it was, perhaps, the most loyal to the traditions of legitimacy during our period. We have already told of its part in the fight against the monopoly;[2] but let us recall at this point that it was the only house in London besides the two monopoly theatres where the law allowed the performance of anything but "burlettas" and melodramas, and that it enjoyed this privilege only for the summer months. Hazlitt remarked that it was "the most sociable of all the theatres."[3] During the first two decades of the century this little house[4] under Colman the younger, when not producing its author-manager's work, was devoted mainly to the reproduction of the successes of the major companies. Many good but second-rate monopoly actors found employment here during the four summer months. Much more rarely it gave a new actor, or even a new drama, a hearing. Here Elliston, Charles Mathews, Senior, and Liston made their débuts.

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[1] The first building bearing the name was opened Dec. 29, 1720, by a carpenter, John Potter; the first performances were given by a company of French players. Its success gave rise to other little theatres, but only the Haymarket survived monopoly opposition. Its boldness, culminating in the Fielding satirical burlesques, brought down on it the wrath of the government and led to the legislation supplementing the patents. Macklin, Foote, and others maintained it for years by subterfuge. In 1766, under Foote, it was officially sanctioned as the summer home for spoken drama. Colman, who purchased the house and its summer privileges in 1777, slightly enlarged it by adding a third tier of boxes. Both stage and auditorium were tiny in comparison with the great monopoly theatres.

[2] See p. 45, and n. 1.

[3] *Examiner*, July 29, 1815.

[4] When in 1820 Morris succeeded Colman the house was rebuilt at a cost of £20,000 in the form which, with many minor changes, is familiar to-day. During the summer months it appropriately continued the Foote traditions of comedy, and was regarded, even after its season was lengthened, as the chief comedy theatre. Here occurred in the twenties the astonishing run of the farce *Paul Pry*, continuing 114 nights, then the entire Haymarket season. This success was referred to as late as 1841 by a writer in the *Theatrical Observer* as "one of the most remarkable epochs in theatrical affairs." Perhaps no English farce was ever more effectively acted than this little piece by Poole, in which appeared Farren, Liston, Mrs. Waylett, Mrs. Glover, and Madame Vestris.

The Haymarket was noted also for its unique financial success. Its limitation to the summer months conferred upon it an absolute monopoly for that season, except for some slight competition with the English Opera House. During the run of *Paul Pry* box prices were paid for seats in the balcony. Its high tide occurred when the drama elsewhere was at low ebb.

Under the management of Webster from 1837 to 1853, and of Buckstone for the rest of our period, it "kept the banners of the legitimate flying." Here were produced Lytton's *Money*, Jerrold's *Time Works Wonders*, Marston's *Strathmore*, and Reade and Taylor's *Masks and Faces*. Even after 1860, when it was considered by the Robertsonians to have outlived its usefulness, it produced successfully such fresh work as Taylor's *American Cousin*, with Sothern as Dundreary, and even Robertson's *David Garrick*, also with Sothern in the title rôle.

Although the Italian opera competed with the drama seriously at only one point, — that of social attractiveness, — we must glance hastily at its annals to realize the extent of its allurement. The King's Theatre, as it was known during most of our period, was the second oldest of the continuous London theatres.[1] After a fire in 1789 it

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[1] It dated from 1705, when it was opened to the fashionable world by John Vanbrugh and William Congreve. Because its vast proportions unfitted it for drama, in 1707 it became the home of Italian opera. Throughout the eighteenth century it was regarded as one of the largest and most resplendent theatres in the world, and was the resort of the most brilliant audiences.

After it was remodelled in 1818, the length from the curtain to the backs of the rear boxes was 102 feet. The extreme width was 75 feet. The stage was 60 feet wide and 80 feet deep. The greatest interior dimension of the 1794 Drury Lane house was only 70 feet. As late as 1840, neither of the major theatres could boast a stage more than 50 feet wide. (For a comparison of the measurements see *Theat. Obs.*, no. 5634, Jan. 11, 1840.)

Its legal standing was by agreement rather than legislation. An understanding was arrived at, in 1792, between the opera and the monopoly houses, to the effect that neither party should invade the other's province. As in their dealing with the minor houses, the monopoly houses were unscrupulous in filching from the opera. Many noted singers were enticed from the opera house to rescue the theatre managements from failure. The most notable attempt was made by Bunn in 1845, when he signed a contract with Jenny Lind to secure for his theatre her London début. Lumley, the manager was rebuilt on a vaster scale and opened brilliantly in 1791. It closely approximated the dimensions of La Scala in Milan. Until its destruction in 1867 its history was merely that of foreign opera in England. With it were associated in all minds the music of the great composers from Mozart to Gounod and the voices of all great singers from Catalini and Braham to Nilsson, Titiens, and Patti. Although it was blamed for impoverishing the drama by seducing the fashionable world, in point of financial success the opera house was hardly more fortunate than the monopoly theatres. From 1820 to 1827 the management lost, according to Ebers's statement, £3,000 annually.[1] No manager of the ill-starred house succeeded.

One fact, however, gives color to the complaint of the monopoly managers. During the most despondent period of the theatres, the opera had its greatest vogue. From 1824 to 1846 there appeared in London two of the greatest singers in the history of opera, Pasta and Jenny Lind: and besides there were heard Sontag, Malibran, Lablache, Rubini, Tamburini, Grisi, and a host of others now forgotten, but then sufficiently famous to add brilliancy to what was probably the most imposing period of opera in England. Never before or since has the drama been such easy prey, and certainly never since has opera in London been able to repeat its depredation.

The chief attraction of this house, however, was not opera, but dress. Throughout Europe it was venerated as the most brilliant of social spectacles, and for this reason it was especially recommended in all guide books to London. Even the "pittites" were required to appear in full dress.[2]

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of the opera house, succeeded in enforcing the old agreement, and poor Bunn had to relinquish the only sure attraction during a long period of calamity.

[1] Baker, p. 180.

[2] There was a note to this effect in Cruchley's *Picture of London*, 1834. The price of admission to the pit was given as half a guinea, and to the gallery, five shillings. Contrary to the practice of the theatres, the performances did not begin until eight because of the fashionable dinner hour.

The last season of prosperity at the King's Theatre was that of 1851, when *Fidelio* was heard for the first time in England. Covent Garden, then abandoned by the drama, was thought to be more suitable than the King's Theatre for opera and was so used until it was burned in 1856. Thereupon the King's Theatre was again opened for opera continuing its operatic seasons until its destruction in 1867, the year in which it gave London Nilsson's Marguerite. It was rebuilt in 1871.

The four theatres so far described were privileged more than all the rest. Not unnaturally they have therefore been regarded as the only ones of interest to the student of dramatic art. Many of the lesser houses, in which only "illegitimate" drama might be presented, were, I believe, historically of as much importance, and to these we shall next bring our attention.

"Dans l adversité de nos meilleurs amis nous trouvons toujours quelque chose qui ne nous déplaît pas." Extenuating friendship was absent from the satisfaction with which the minor theatres watched and tried to hurry the decline of the majors. Theirs was no mere sordid glee: it was their belief, and that of the public as well, that out of this reversal of fortune, something better for the British drama would somehow — no one dared to say exactly how — be effected. The minor managements, the critics, and the theatrical democracy shared these hopeful stirrings. A considerable body of conservatives, on the other hand, found gloomy comfort in a very different hope. During the monopoly period — especially in the "palmy days of Kean and Macready" — these loyal spirits had come to associate great acting with great theatres, great audiences and thundered enthusiasm — "rising of the pit," salvos of applause, and the rare but imposing tributes of royalty and fashion. Only when such scenes should again be enacted at the great theatres, these devotees insisted, would England have drama worthy of her past. Amid disheartening evidence to the contrary, they dreamed and wrote of the discovery of some unsuspected Shakespeare in another age of renascent literary greatness. Such worshippers thought their bard belittled when his plays were presented in the vulgar minor theatres. In their eyes England's dramatic sun had set when Shakespeare's plays were dragged down by Charles Kean to the stage of the Princess's Theatre.

The majority of playgoers, however, were indifferent to the profanation. Indeed, they were actively sympathetic with the minor houses and gladly identified their own democratic cause with that of the hitherto oppressed "illegitimates." Had not the majors failed, and failed unpardonably, to please them? What might not the minor theatres bring forth if only they had the chance? Few of the generation were to live to see any marked improvement at least in the way they expected. Most of them were to be disillusioned like all who hope to bring about great reforms by superficial measures. Because of this delusion, many failed to realize the progress actually made. After the freeing of the theatres a slow movement toward a new dramatic excellence set in. Because it was not what the lovers of Shakespeare and Sheridan expected, some weakly protested, but the majority more philosophically welcomed the improvements, such as they were, and were content to believe that for the present, at least, no great dramatic era was possible. Whether or not they were right is not our chief concern. Whatever people thought, it is now certain that the stage was progressing toward better things. It is for us to mark that progress.

Among the minors that had survived the eighteenth century, none is more interesting than the oldest, Sadler's Wells.[1] At the beginning of our period this theatre was well prepared to take its place among the rising "illegitimates." Astley's and the Surrey had specialized in equestrian displays. Sadler's Wells hit upon the idea of utilizing its superfluous water-supply which its name implied for a novel dramatic sensation. In 1804 a tank 90 feet long, 24 feet wide, and 5 feet deep,[1] was constructed in place of a stage, and a second tank was placed higher up in the wings. A platform was constructed over the tank in such a way that it might be raised to the ceiling, exposing the water to the audience, or lowered to serve as a stage. Thus quickly did the minor theatres adopt the ideas of the new melodrama introduced at Covent Garden in 1802.[2] Water dramas, with all that they suggest, were the specialty of this theatre until the repeal of the monopoly. Thereupon occurred what was perhaps the most amazing transformation in the history of the English drama. This theatre, which, except for a few brief periods, had been among the lowest in London, became suddenly, in 1844, the scene of the most complete series of Shakespearean revivals in the history of the British stage. Of Phelps, the worker of this miracle, we shall have much to say later. After him, Sadler's Wells lapsed into even a deeper oblivion than had previously obscured it — that of modern vulgarity without even the charm of water effects.[3]

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[1] The walls erected for the enlarged theatre in 1765 still stand and are accounted older than those of any other theatre in London, if not in Europe. (Baker, p. 376.) In that year Rosomon replaced the old wooden "music house" that had stood in the garden of Sadler's Wells since 1684. This earlier

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theatre had been notorious for its depraved audiences and coarse shows. The later theatre was more music hall than theatre, although occasionally its tight-rope performers and trained dogs yielded to something approaching a play. One distinguished dramatic performance, that of *The Deserter*, was widely noticed in 1783. It is supposed that Edmund Kean — then a boy — was the young Master Cary who made a first public appearance there in a declamation from *Pizarro*.

[1] Baker, p. 365.

[2] The *Siege of Gibraltar* was the first of these "pantomime spectacles" to be given with tank effects — a real boat on real water, a heroine plunging from a cliff with a perceptible splash, and a battleship consumed in flames. Then followed the "burletta" period, with melodrama spoken to the tinkling of a piano, and the tank used merely as background. Finally, the tank was abandoned and only melodrama remained.

[3] Under the patronage of the Duke of Devonshire a project to revive the former "legitimacy" of this theatre is one of the most interesting announcements of the coming dramatic season.

ANGLING AT SADLER'S WELLS.

London Pub.d by Allen & West 15. Paternoster row Oct.r 12. 1796.

The early career of the great transpontine theatre, known first as the Royal Circus and later as the Surrey, was curiously similar to that of the *théâtres des boulevards.*[1] In both instances children helped in the evasion of the law. In Paris the youngsters replaced the marionettes.[2] The management of the Surrey assembled a juvenile corps of ballet to go with its spectacles, apparently with the hope that children would enable it to operate without a license. The subterfuge did not succeed as well in London as in Paris: the house was soon closed by the magistrates. When finally in 1782 Hughes obtained for it a license, he took Charles Dibdin into partnership and replaced the old school by an elaborate theatre with a circus ring instead of a pit. The association of horsemanship with the drama was contagious, as we have observed even in Kemble's management of Covent Garden, and it was so often blamed for the decline of the drama that it is not superfluous to repeat here what Baker quotes from Dibdin concerning the origin of this form of amusement.

> Horsemanship [wrote Dibdin] was at that time very much admired, and I conceived that, if I could divest it of blackguardism, it might be made an object of public consequence: I proposed, therefore, that it should embrace all the dexterity and reputation of ancient chivalry; that tournaments, running at the ring, and other feats of equestrian celebrity should be performed. I proposed to have a stage on which might be represented spectacles, each to terminate with a joust or tilting match, or some other grand object, so managed as to form a novel and striking *coup de théâtre*, and that the business of the stage and ring might be united.[3]

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[1] Maurice Albert (*Théâtres de la Foire*, 1900, p. 229) states that in these Parisian minors "les dances des cordes étaient devenues des pantomimes et des parades; et les parades devinrent des farces." Similarly at the Surrey, built as a school of horsemanship in the Blackfriars Road by Charles Hughes in 1771, the horsemanship turned into pantomime and spectacle; and the spectacle gradually became melodrama and farce.

[2] *Théâtres de la Foire*, p. 224.

[3] Baker, p. 390.

Thus *some* of the conditions of the Æschylean theatre were established in London!

The sensational career of this house under Elliston and Dibdin we have described at considerable length in the chapter on the theatrical monopoly. Elliston from 1809 to 1814 dispensed with the circus ring.[1] It was restored by Dibdin, who succeeded Elliston in 1814, but two years later it was permanently removed. Dibdin supplied the house with pieces of his own and maintained for it a reputation of respectability. Later, it fell back to the general level of transpontine melodrama and spectacle. Its specialty then became the dramatization of crime. Baker tells of the display of a gig actually used by a murderer as a stage property.[2] Tomlins states that by "Surrey piece" was generally meant a portrayal of "watermen below the Bridge and housemaids above."[3]

Another period of Elliston's management after 1826 raised the theatre again to importance among the minors. In 1829 it gave refuge to Douglas Jerrold, who had escaped from the sordid Coburg, and who, on January 26 of that year, produced here the first wholly English melodrama[4] to win a wide reputation — *Black-eyed Susan.* Like Moncrieff's *Rochester*, it drew the general theatre-going public to the south side of the river, and did more than any previous event to raise the minors in popular esteem.[5]

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[1] This was a feature of the new theatre which in 1803 replaced the original Hughes-Dibdin house.

[2] Baker, p. 392.

[3] Tomlins, *Brief View of the English Drama*, p. 57.

[4] *Ambrose Gwinett* was Jerrold's first domestic melodrama. Dr. McCleod considers Buckstone's *Luke the Laborer* the first Anglicized melodrama. (Unpublished Thesis, Harvard, 1915, p. 65.)

[5] Since at this time the Adelphi supplied the public with the melodrama well staged and nearer at hand, the Surrey soon lapsed again to the condition of a neighborhood theatre presenting "Surrey pieces." Here, nevertheless, Cushman and Macready appeared in 1846. Toward the end of our period the tragedian Creswick appropriated it.

The rival which finally supplanted the Surrey in horsemanship was Astley's Amphitheatre.[1] After two fires Philip Astley reopened it in 1804 with a magnificent equestrian spectacle, similar to those already familiar at the Surrey. Even more famous as a rider was Ducrow, who controlled the house from 1830 to 1841. He was frequently a guest on the major stages. The *Theatrical Journal*[2] describes a performance of Ducrow's in which he appeared first as a pilgrim. Mounting his horse he transformed himself into a Polichinello, and then into a young peasant "burning with love for a bright mistress whose beauties he conjured up . . . by the pure force of his imagination." After a bewildering harlequin dance, in comparison with which "the wonders of the Indian Juggler were commonplace," he changed himself into a classical impersonation of the air. This seems to have been his most admired assumption: the writer says he excelled in the "highest creations of classical poetry." Baker cites Christopher North's unqualified admiration of his performances:

> The glory of Ducrow lies in his poetical interpretations. Why, the horse is but air, as it were, on which he flies. The god-like grace in that volant movement, fresh from Olympus. . . . These impersonations by Ducrow prove that he is a man of genius . . . thus to convert his frame into such forms, shapes, attitudes, postures, as the Greek imagination moulded into perfect expression of the highest state of the soul, shows that Ducrow has a spirit similar to those who in marble made their mythology immortal.[3]

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[1] When it was opened, in 1770, it was merely a circus ring covered by an awning. Astley's horsemanship attracted even the upper classes. In 1780 he was able to build a substantial theatre on the lines of the Surrey, and in 1787 he borrowed Dibdin's idea of setting off his riding with a "burletta." The house was twice burned.

[2] Aug. 30, 1845.

[3] *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, quoted by Baker, p. 386.

At Astley's the ring remained much longer than at the Surrey as evidence of its admirable devotion to equestrianship.

A still more interesting theatre surviving the eighteenth century was Dr. Arnold's English Opera House.[1] Arnold took it over in 1794, with the intention of encouraging English opera, but failed to get a license.[2] In 1810 his son, S. J. Arnold, obtained the license, denied his father, to present in English elaborate operas even with spoken dialogue,[3] in so far as dialogue and music should make out an operatic entertainment. While the house was not in demand for opera, — as was frequently the case, — it was rented for other forms of entertainment within the sanction of the law. Of these the one closest to our interest was Charles Mathews's "At Homes," reminiscent of Foote's "Teas." We shall have more to say of these "At Homes" later, in their relation to acting. They began in 1818 and were given intermittently for about ten years. Rebuilt in 1830 after a conflagration, this theatre became a storm centre in the monopoly crisis, and from that time on it figured chiefly in lawsuits and failing speculation. It exploited French companies, concerts, and opera — foreign as well as domestic. In 1841 the "Council of Dramatic Authors" appropriated it in an unsuccessful attempt to revolutionize the drama.

After the freeing of the theatres it became one of London's leading houses. Here for several seasons the Keeleys delighted the public, not only with farces and extravaganzas, but more notably with dramatizations of Dickens's plots, for which they became justly famous. Of these, *Martin Chuzzlewit* was the most admired.

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[1] The part it played in the fight for a free stage is already familiar (see p. 45). According to Baker, it was opened in 1765, under the name of the Lyceum, as an exhibition hall for artists. A breeches-maker later engaged it for public entertainments.

[2] Since Dr. Arnold failed to secure his license, he returned the house to the breeches-maker. In it Mme. Tussaud held her first London exhibition. Sheridan's company took refuge in it after the Drury Lane fire in 1809.

[3] Nicholson, p. 248 and p. 252.

Madame Vestris and Charles Mathews the younger made here their last united managerial venture in 1847, erecting the Lyceum for a number of years into one of the most elegant and fashionable of the London playhouses. We shall later have much to say of their contribution during this period to the progress of dramatic art.

We have still to make the acquaintance of the two houses which were probably the most conspicuous in the development of the "illegitimate" drama — the Olympic,[1] celebrated for burlesque, and the Adelphi, for melodrama. Elliston's connection with it is already sufficiently familiar to us. Its chief claim upon our interest lies in the Vestris-Mathews management, which will form an important part of our later study. From 1831 to 1837 her magic touch raised it from the wretchedness into which it had fallen under Elliston, and made it one of the most fashionable of London's theatres as the home of refined burlesque. With the departure of Vestris and Mathews in 1837, its spell was broken and it remained negligible until its destruction in 1849. Even after its restoration, it continued to fail, until the burlesque genius, Robson, under Farren's management, revived its early celebrity as a burlesque-producing stage.[2] After 1864 it was known chiefly for its "Olympic pieces," of a racy melodramatic character.

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[1] The Olympic was the first minor bold enough to intrude upon the sacred theatrical precincts of Westminster. Astley, armed with a license from Lord Dartmouth, erected on Wych Street, in 1806, another amphitheatre to accommodate his fashionable London patrons. Constructed from a naval prize, *Ville de Paris*, — horse-ring, stage, boxes, and gallery at a total cost of less than £800 — this little theatre was pretentious only in name — Astley's Middlesex Amphitheatre. But Astley had brought horsemanship to Westminster in vain. After seven years of failure, he gave the house up to Elliston, who converted it into a theatre, which he too boldly named Little Drury Lane. He was soon forced to return to the original name, the Olympic Pavilion.

[2] During this period of popularity, which lasted from 1853 till 1864, there was more than Robson's gifts to attract. Here Tom Taylor's successes were achieved, with a company including Robson, Wigan, Emery, and Mrs. Stirling.

What the Olympic did to civilize burlesque was done in part for melodrama at the Adelphi. These theatres were exactly contemporaneous. Both were built by reason of Lord Dartmouth's liberal licensing in 1806.[1] Under Jones and Rodwell in 1819 it entered as the Adelphi, upon the career of "literary illegitimacy" brought into vogue by Elliston. It made a unique reputation for itself by staging Scott's tales. Except for a few successes like that of *Tom and Jerry*,[2] this house was later abandoned to the more sensational type of melodrama. Of *Valmondi*, produced there in 1824, the *Theatrical Observer* reports:[3] "Another crowded house graced this theatre last night. *Valmondi* is generally acknowledged to be one of the most terrific pieces ever produced on the stage: therefore, all who like horribles should not fail to see it." The horrors, too, were not confined to this world, for we are told that the play closed with a vivid representation of some in the next.

In the following year this theatre was transformed somewhat as, later, the Olympic was glorified by Vestris. What she did for burlesque at the Olympic, Terry and Yates did in part for melodrama at the Adelphi.[4] It is interesting, at least, to find it mentioned in Cruchley's *Picture of London* (1835), which was a kind of guide-book for the city, as "by far the most fashionably attended of all the minor theatres." By a strange persistence of its type, this theatre in 1860 attracted Boucicault when he returned to London with his newly fashioned Irish and American melodramas. In that year *Colleen Bawn* reintroduced the author of *London Assurance*, *The Vampire*, and the English versions of *The Corsican Brothers* and *Louis XI*. It seems hardly likely that Boucicault exhibited any of the "Adelphi Guests," which a few years later the Robertsonians held up to ridicule as a symbol of the wretchedness of the drama. Just when these "guests" made their appearance, I have not ascertained. Knight tells us they were actors wretchedly costumed to represent guests at the Adelphi. On the contrary, Boucicault owed no small part of his fame to his elaborate scenery and costumes.

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[1] Scott, its builder, began modestly enough with monologues and fireworks. He soon took advantage of the increasing minor privileges, and gave melodramas, musical farces, and burlesques, like those at the Surrey. He continued it until 1819, under the name of the Sans Pareil. Accounts in the *Inquisitor* indicate that it enjoyed a fair reputation.

[2] A second *Beggar's Opera*, called *Tom and Jerry*, by Moncrieff, created a sensation here in 1821, running for 300 nights. The following year this piece spread to nine other London houses, including the majors.

[3] No. 934, Nov. 26, 1824.

[4] The company included Wrench, Reeve, T. P. Cooke, Tyrone Power, Mrs. Fitzwilliams, and Miss Brunton, who later became Mrs. Yates. Their first great success was Cooper's *The Pilot*. Cooke's *Long Tom Coffin* became a classic. Thus was initiated the long series of "Adelphi pieces," of which Buckstone, Jerrold, and Fitzball were the principal authors. *The Wreck Ashore*, *Green Bushes*, and *The Flowers of the Forest* were well-known examples. A company which included at one time the Yateses, Charles Mathews, Buckstone, and Mrs. Stirling must have been far from contemptible.

In 1865 the Adelphi was leased for Shakespearean revivals by Miss Jones and Miss Bateman. Joseph Jefferson later drew crowds to it. In 1868 Fechter reclaimed it for melodramatic romance. At the Adelphi, therefore, almost all the vicissitudes of Anglicized melodrama may be traced.

The four houses which we shall next consider were the most influential during the last decades of our study: the St. James's, chief exponent of French art; the Princess's, where drama was at last regalized and management modernized; the Strand, where Miss Wilton first manifested the spirit of realistic comedy in the more recent sense; and the Prince of Wales's, where the Robertsonian school triumphed over the old conventionalities, only to set up conventionalities of its own which the spirit of our age is still busily engaged in discrediting and banishing, to make way for that something better which is always the will-o'-the-wisp of dramatic art.

The St. James's was one of the superfluous theatres encouraged by Conyngham in 1835; hence its reputation of being the "unlucky theatre." [1] It attained to some prominence in 1842 as a resort for French companies.[2] Like the opera, French acting was chiefly an aristocratic fad. The student will never be at a loss to discover or account for French influence on the English theatre of this period, whether French companies visited London or not. The St. James's, however, afforded a cheap and convenient substitute for a trip to Paris. Critics, too, like G. H. Lewes, found the French acting at this theatre a convenient weapon in their onslaughts upon English stagecraft. Only after 1870 did this theatre, controlled by the Kendalls and John Hare, become an important factor in the progress of dramatic art.

The Princess's was another house resulting from the unhealthy speculation preceding the free-theatre bill. Until 1842 it ranked modestly as a concert hall; later, as an opera house, competing unsuccessfully. Its situation near the better residential districts gave it an advantage which was recognized by Charles Kean, who, with Court patronage, opened it for his elaborate Shakespearean revivals, which gave it standing as London's most brilliant playhouse from 1850 to 1858. This event was one of the most obvious results of free theatres. Kean's work as manager and as actor must form an important part of our later study, more particularly for his contribution to the advancement of "gentlemanly melodrama" than for his genius as a Shakespearean actor, for, as such, he never merited or won the admiration of the best critics.

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[1] The tenor, John Braham, intended it for opera. With the failure of the Lyceum before his eyes, he had little reason to hope for success. When he turned to the drama, his failure was even more complete. Among the unsuccessful pieces at this house it is interesting to note Dickens's early efforts for the stage, *The Village Coquettes* (1836) and *Is She his Wife?* (1837).

[2] Many French companies had appeared at the Queen's. Under Mitchell's management, Plessy, Déjazet, Frederick Lemaître, Ravel, Levasseur, and Rachel, Bernhardt's great predecessor, were seen at the St. James's.

The Strand, dating from the last decade of the monopoly,[1] was wholly inconspicuous until in 1858 the Swanboroughs made it attractive by imparting a new vitality to the old hackneyed art of burlesque, with H.G. Byron as author and Miss Wilton as the chief embodiment of the new comic spirit.

The house to which Miss Wilton withdrew, to exploit her personal successes at the Strand, was generally thought of as the most contemptible in London. Her audacity in choosing it for her experiment was, perhaps, the best guaranty of its success. Except for the French companies that had frequented it before 1842, its existence was a blank so far as the general public was concerned.[2] What it was like when Miss Wilton leased it in 1865, she records by way of impressions upon a visit which she and her partner, H. J. Byron, made to this "Dusthole" in the preceding year. She tells how they were dismayed at the sight of the rabble that made up the audience, because it was as intent upon talking, drinking ginger beer, eating oranges, and throwing about the skins, as it was upon the acting. As they entered the box, someone from the pit shouted: "Now, then, you stuck-up ones, come out of that, or I 'll send this 'ere horange at your 'eads." Miss Wilton was not frightened away from the box or from the management of the theatre, but remained to make it one of the most significant playhouses in the history of modern English drama. Not only was her spirit right, but the conditions of the dramatic world were right, too. A consideration of her success and its significance completes the present study. We shall therefore give it space proportionate to its undeniable importance beyond that attaching to any other movement of our period.

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[1] Built in 1832, it was immediately involved in litigation because of a foolish attempt on the part of its management to run counter to the monopoly — the more foolish because it was made without even a magistrate's license.

[2] The Queen's — later known as the Prince of Wales's — was situated in a wretched environment off Tottenham Court Road. By 1809 it had progressed from a concert hall to a horse-ring theatre, called the Regency. When Dibdin turned the Surrey pit back into a horse ring in 1814, the Regency management turned its horse ring into a pit. No doubt its dramatic ventures deserved the almost universal disregard accorded them. Shortly after 1815 French companies made appearances here, but gained no considerable public until, in 1826, the comedian Poitier, whose Parisian fame had preceded him, attracted aristocracy and fashion. Previously the French visitors had probably made their chief appeal to the foreign population of the quarter. The prices of admission for the French performances, however, indicate a considerably better type of patron than frequented this theatre for its summer program of "illegitimate" drama. The regular prices of admission for such entertainment were given in Britton's *Picture of London* for 1826 as 4*s* for boxes, 2*s* for the pit, and 1*s* for the gallery; but for the French companies boxes were advertised for 7*s* and the pit for 3*s* 6*d*. Baker says (p. 239), however, that for Mlle. George the prices were raised only to 2*s* 6*d* for the pit. In 1826 it boldly invaded the monopoly under the name of Brunton's West London Theatre, with productions of *She Stoops to Conquer*, *The School for Scandal*, and *The Wonder*, all announced as "burlettas." The attempt failed. Chapman, its manager, renewed his fight, and during the thirties Waylett, Stephens, and even Vestris unsuccessfully attempted to manage it. After 1839 it was abandoned, even by the French companies. Known generally as the "Dusthole," it shared, so Baker declares (p. 317), with the Bower Saloon in Stangate, the reputation of being London's lowest playhouse.

Other institutions of a theatrical nature must be relegated to an appendix.[1] Because of their remoteness or their insignificance, they contributed little or nothing to even the "illegitimate" drama.

Having made a more or less thorough inspection of the London theatrical map, we are prepared, perhaps, to make a few general statements concerning the facts so surveyed. There was a marked increase in the number of theatres, and in the liberty with which they might present the spoken drama. From ten houses in 1800, of which only three were of any importance, the number of theatres increased to twenty-nine, of which all might, and many actually did, present the spoken drama. By 1870, too, there were ten or more other places of amusement,[2] including concert halls giving variety programs. But external growth was not all. During these seventy years was wrought upon the London stage a transformation more considerable than had taken place during the two and a half centuries preceding. During the seven decades reviewed in this study stagecraft progressed from practices that were virtually those of the Restoration to the complex and unlimited dramatic world which we in our time call "modern." When we remember also that this expansion was hindered by unreasonable governmental restrictions, and that the state of the city outside of the theatres was most unfavorable, we are led, I believe, to the conclusion that the work actually accomplished by those laboring for dramatic art was less contemptible than we have been in the habit of asserting. A steady, consistent, and praiseworthy progress was made even in spite of the obstacles which so far we have had chiefly to consider. We are better prepared now to turn our attention to the stream of life that flowed on among these obstacles and in spite of them. First let us consider the contribution to this stream made in the appurtenances of the playhouse.

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[1] Appendix I.

[2] See Appendix I.

Chapter IV

HISTRIONIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAYHOUSE

SO far we have regarded the stage as a victim of circumstance. We shall now view it as a living organism. In all ages the drama has shown extraordinary vitality and powers of resistance. This energy has been especially noticeable in England, where, from its earliest days, Church and State have conspired to thwart dramatic activity. When, indeed, they have done their worst, as in the days of the Commonwealth and in the period we are considering, the drama has somehow survived, and, although seriously hampered and weakened, it has retained enough energy for growth. This growth during the first seventy years of the nineteenth century is the subject of the following chapters. We shall consider it in all its aspects, beginning with the theatres regarded not as mere buildings but as homes for the adolescent drama.

Let us imagine ourselves in the noisy, filthy streets of London, on a foggy night during the first ten years of the century. A few flickering gas-lamps have perhaps appeared in Pall Mall, but our way to the great theatre in Covent Garden is lit by the cloudy light waved about by shouting link-boys. A few gorgeous chairs are brought to the doors by liveried porters, but fashion is more generally seen alighting from hackney coaches. The pantomime for the Christmastide is attracting a gay and noisy throng. Securing our slip of paper for the pit, we abandon ourselves to the mad rush for front seats. There is no centre aisle, so we must scramble over the benches and be thankful that they have no backs. Women are shrieking for fear their brains will be knocked out, and the behavior of many a surly-looking Britisher, all elbows and knees, gives cause for their fears. Cries of "Watch your pockets!" add zest to the hubbub. Hardly knowing how, we find ourselves suddenly planted upon a hard bench, not far from the stage, where we shall sit, with no hope of escape, for at least four hours. The gorgeous yet subdued blaze of a thousand candles in the lustres, makes still gayer the throngs in their brightly tinted holiday frocks, waistcoats, plumed bonnets, and powdered wigs. Above and around us are four huge sweeping balconies, partitioned, except at the back of the upper two, into little pen-like boxes from which the happy, plump faces of well-to-do children peep out upon the animated scene with a spontaneous joy that is shared even by their bored and pompous elders.

A huge square proscenium, in the sides of which a few stage boxes are set, frames a dark green haze of curtain — not the present-day parlor affair with plush and tassels, every ugly refinement of which our glare of electricity exposes, but a deep, reverend, mysterious field of green in a dim religious glow, behind which lies a world of anticipated wonders. The stage "apron," making out into the audience far more than the front stages of our theatres, is flanked by huge stage doors. Along its front edge is a row of fiddlers and swell-cheek blowers, who add superfluous animation to the noisy crowd.

Cries of "Bottled porter and cider! spruce and ginger beer!" come from the distant balconies, and near us the decorous voice of a trimly dressed matron politely suggests, "Choice fruits and bill of the play!" Another following close behind offers, "The book of the play and songs of the evening!" Our red-faced neighbor has picked out an apple to match his cheeks, ostentatiously paying a penny. For the same amount we secure a sheet of coarse paper a foot long and half a foot broad, blotchily exhibiting all the printer's fonts — especially the largest. A glance informs us that to-night will be performed The Tragedy of MACBETH, that it was "written by William Shakespeare," and that it is to be "acted for *the Last Time* this season." The names Mr. Kemble and Mrs. Siddons are almost lost in a jumble of the less important performers. The tragedy is to be followed by a "splendid revival of Mr. Holcroft's *melodrame*, The Tale of Mystery," including "all of the original speaking, dancing, and pantomime; also the original music, composed by Dr. Busby. Dresses and Decorations entirely new." Last, and chief of all in the hearts of the Christmas revelers, "The new and superb Pageant and Pantomime, HARLEQUIN AND THE CHIMNEY SWEEP."

Our fingers, we are startled to discover, are smudged with the greenish black ink of our bill, and our clothes with the ink of our neighbor's. But our hardships are soon forgotten. Our watches say half-past six. The curtain has risen, and "the entire company" stands revealed on the witches' heath. The fiddlers strike up "God Save the King," and a splendid burst of patriotism follows, chiefly from "the entire company." This devotional exercise finished, the play begins in the full glare of the auditorium lights.

For the most part the audience manifests no interest in the shrieks of the witches. The hubbub that preceded the singing continues. What cares that gay crowd if "Paddock calls"? Recognizing us as foreigners, a lover of the stage assures us from behind that this is a bad night to have come, that only people wanting to see the pantomime are present at this season. The play has progressed to the entry of Macbeth. A tall, superbly commanding figure strides forth from the flies. From half the audience bursts a storm of applause; from the other half a still louder storm of hisses and catcalls. "Off with it! None of your Scotch for us!" they shout, and the cry is taken up in all parts of the house. Our amazement at this welcome accorded the leading British tragedian is ill concealed, and calls forth from the devotee behind us the explanation that this is not disrespect for Kemble, but merely a protest against the real Scotch bonnet with the eagle's feather with which to-night for the first time he has boldly broken with the long-established custom of wearing in tragedy the "shuttlecock" headdress of ostrich plumes.[1]

A change of scene takes place, and Siddons stands before us, reading the fateful letter. She is greeted by round after round of applause — seven in all — carefully counted out as the just meed of her fame. A spirit of idolatry has come suddenly over the restless audience. They listen breathless to her words, not from eagerness to follow the play, but with a sportsmanlike desire to catch the first "point" for applause. They have not long to wait. "To catch the nearest way," she utters, with what spiritual cold, what depth of suggested crime! A wild cry from the "heavens" is followed by a salvo of applause. The first "point" has been made and the score set down. The game is at last really on. At every familiar stroke of genius the audience claps, stamps, and shouts its delight. On this occasion, Siddons seems to win with ease; and we wonder whether Kemble will ever again appear in his Scotch bonnet. When other actors hold the stage, the excitement and interest abates. They talk, or rather shout, through their parts like people at some unpleasant but necessary task. They have few "points" to make, so what does it matter? The play wears on, the audience now listless or talkative, now intently and feverishly bound up in the sublime action of the protagonists. Wild is the applause that breaks in after almost every line of the sleep-walking scene. But this marks the limit of the public's patience. The play drags to an end amid rustling and the murmur of gay voices.

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[1] Such a disturbance actually occurred when Kemble, at the suggestion of Sir Walter Scott, first donned the Scotch headdress. See Dutton Cook, *A Book of the Plays*, p. 353.

Then comes the *melodrame*. There is no disguising the fact that the charms of Shakespeare are as nothing to the powerful excitement of Pixérécourt. The vast audience fairly vibrates to the thrills of the pulsing music, and the bursts of heroic effort to carry entrenchment after entrenchment of injustice. Oh, the joy of suffering the agonies of the dumb and helpless father, and of the abused maid of snow-white innocence! But oh, the still greater joy of seeing the villain brother's retribution!

It is nearly eleven. The poor little eyelids that have thus far kept bravely open must surely be heavy. Let them take courage. The pantomime is to begin. The audience is in a frenzy of impatience. All for the time are children. Hardly can they wait for the servants of the theatre to remove the green baize carpet, which, spread over all the stage, has denoted the presence of tragedy. As the *Times* remarked of a similar pantomime audience, "it had laid itself out to be pleased." Not a leap of the Harlequin, not a song of the chimney sweep, but sets the house in a roar. Every grimace of Mathews and Munden produces a gale of merriment. The solemn and impressive fact is borne in on us that in this tawdry hodge-podge of nonsense and bad taste, with here and there a flash of wit or a touch of humor, there is something necessary to our frail human nature, something which makes the grim fatality of Shakespeare's drama pass from us like a burden happily cast off and the heroics of Pixérécourt ring in our memories like the echoes of a dull sermon. We have become children again, thanks to the art that can most surely make us such. Perhaps the philosophy of Nisard's tribute to the shallow laugh comes to our minds:

> Heureux le génie à qui il a été donné d'exciter le gros rire. Heureux le spectateur qui se dilate au théâtre! Le rire délicat,

le rire de l'esprit, que provoque le ridicule finement exprimé, laisse une arrière-pensée triste; et comme une arrière goût d'amertume. Le gros rire, qui ne sait aucune réflexion, réjouit le cœur et fait circuler le sang.

The great green curtain at last descends amid storms of unfeigned approval. Although it is long after midnight, no one rises to go. The great door at the left of the proscenium opens and the manager's representative appears to "give out [announce] the pantomime" for repetition. On some occasions this would be a dread moment in the proceedings of the evening, but to-night there can be no doubt in anyone's mind as to the popular verdict. When, however, the people chose to condemn a play, — and this was the moment when they formally sat in judgment, — their derisive hiss was to the failing manager like the Vestals' turning down of thumbs. His production might never again appear within the walls of his own theatre, and the thousands of pounds spent in paint, tinsel, and machinery might be a total loss.

To our surprise the audience shows signs of resentment as the actor, whose name we do not recall, walks confidently to the centre of the "apron." Cries of "Off, off!" are heard. Then deafening calls for "Munden! Munden!" Our informant in the rear explains that this demonstration is merely a usual form of tribute to the people's darling comedian. The dapper nonentity retreats in perfect composure, and even with a smile, for has not this little scene all been planned? What noble resignation to one's own insignificance! As the stage door slams behind him, out of the opposite one steps, or rather bounds, the irrepressible Munden, fairly oozing mirth as he grins and bows in mock confusion. A wholly new performance seems to begin. When at last he is permitted to speak, with a grotesque solemnity he orates: "The unparalleled success of the latest and brightest spark from the anvil of the comic muse will be repeated every evening till further notice." So bent are all upon being delighted, that this banality meets with as great favor as Munden's most telling sallies in the play. Who cares whether to-morrow John Kemble will appear as Hamlet or whether Mr. Sheridan's *Pizarro* will be revived? This is Christmastide, and the pantomime is the thing![1]

With this impressionistic picture as a background, let us now follow the changes which took place in the playhouses, considered as auditoriums, from the turn of the century, when these scenes might have been witnessed, through the period of Robertson with the Bancrofts, end ing in 1870.

First let us consider the heart of the theatre, the pit. Here was to be found, perhaps, the chief difference between the early theatres and those of the present day. In the modern London theatres there survives a suggestion of the old pit seats in the rows of benches crowded in at the back of the floor under the balcony, but the pit in the old sense of the word has for nearly half a century been only a thing of glorious memory. In 1800 it comprised all of the floor, for which an even entrance fee of *3s 6d* was charged. The seats were hard benches with no backs. There was no aisle running through the centre of the house. The rush into the pit must often have resembled a hurdle race; but the staid majority no doubt were content to complete the journey to their seats by the side aisles. We need especially to keep in mind the importance of this vast audience of "pittites," extending down to the orchestra, because of its influence upon the acted drama. It was made up of the poorer middle class, among whom, of course, were then, as now, many of the truest lovers of dramatic art. There was among them, however, none of

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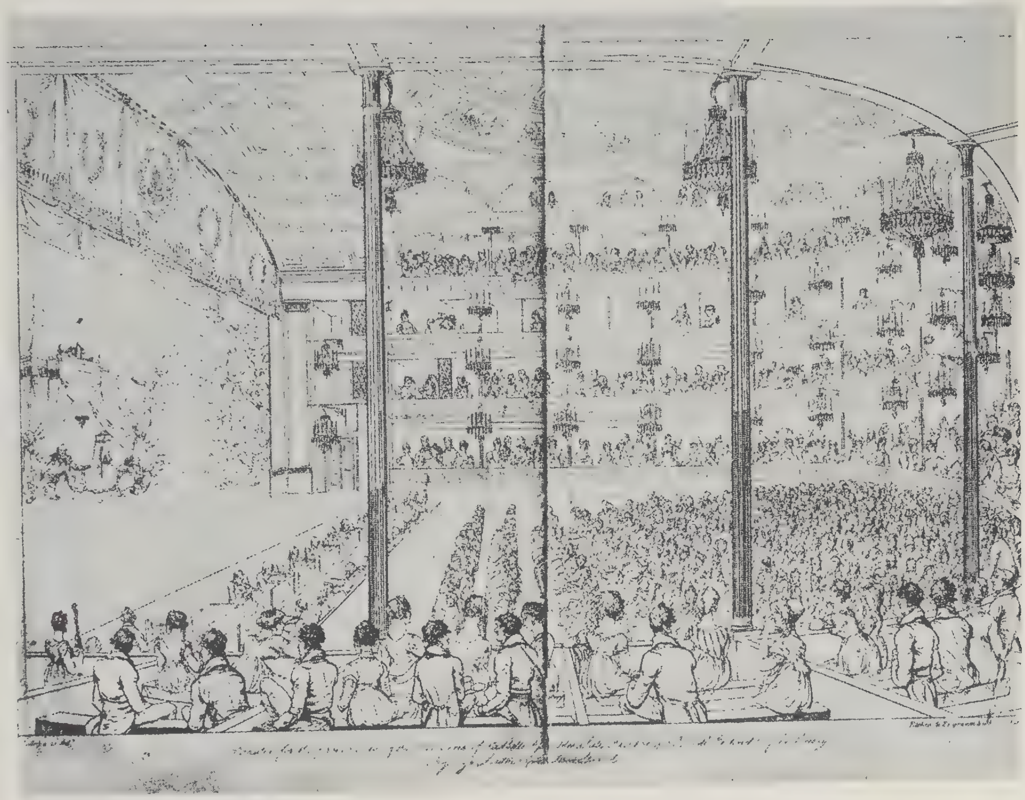
[1] I have presented the conditions of an early-century performance in narrative form for the sake of vividness. My account, although not based upon any definite program, assembles many bits of information from general reading. It conveys no impression, I believe, which is not true of the major houses during at least the first decade of the century.



Interior of the New Covent Garden Theatre as it appeared in 1810

that "tepid decorum," as Roosevelt would call it, to which our modern orchestra stalls are prone. The old pit was spontaneous, and although it was given to great enthusiasms vociferously expressed, it was jealously discriminating. It loved "broad" effects. To this predilection of the pit almost as much as to the vastness of the theatres, the trick of "point-making" was due.

I do not know with certainty when orchestra stalls were first introduced. The earliest reference to them I have seen is in an advertisement of the French company appearing in 1828 at the Lyceum. After mentioning the pit, for which, as usual, three and sixpence was the charge, this document announces some benches at six shillings and some in a part of the orchestra for seven.[1] Dutton Cook assigns the innovation to this same year 1828–29, but says it took place at the Haymarket Opera House (the King's Theatre), and then extended rapidly to the other theatres.[2] It was most natural that this change should first come in the fashionable theatres, where the foreign artists were to be heard and at best poorly understood. I can, however, find no confirmation of the statement that stalls were rapidly introduced in other theatres. Bunn in 1833 tried the experiment at Drury Lane,[3] but without success. Certainly not for many years was there anything like our modern orchestra stalls in the major houses. The Haymarket Theatre appears to have been the first playhouse to have success with stalls. In the bill of that theatre for April 28, 1843, appeared the following announcement:

> By the curtailment of the useless portion of the stage in front of the curtain, and by advancing the orchestra and the lights nearer the actors and scenic effects, the lessee, Mr. Benjamin Webster, has been able to appropriate the portion so

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[1] Advertisement in the *Companion*, 1828, no. 3, Jan. 23, 1828.

[2] Dutton Cook, *A Book of the Play*, p. 90.

[3] See Archer's statement in Ward's *Reign of Victoria*, p. 582.

> obtained to form a certain number of orchestra stalls, which can be retained by parties taking them for the whole evening. For the comfort of those visiting the pit, backs have been placed to all the seats.[1]

Probably at about this time similar changes were made at other minor theatres, such as the Lyceum. There, it appears, they were introduced in 1841 for the Balfe season of opera.[2] In 1856, however, we know that, when the opera company took refuge there after the burning of Covent Garden, "the pit was all distributed into stalls," [3] except for two or three rows at the back. Brereton in his account of the Lyceum asserts that "pit-stalls, and then orchestra stalls, as they came to be known, were brought into use for the first time at the Lyceum." [4] The seats, he says, were red with white backs.

It is safe to assume, I believe, that the stalls were chiefly the result of opera, and that before 1856, when Dillon undertook the management of the Lyceum vacated by the opera troupe, stalls had been introduced very sparingly at the theatres. Webster, at least, was very careful to announce that only the space gained by reducing the stage would be used for the purpose. Like all other theatrical managers, he revered the memory of the O. P. riots. Dillon, too, to avoid trouble, was obliged to reduce the price of his stalls from nine shillings to six. How the stalls appeared at the Covent Garden opera in the early fifties Robertson minutely describes in the *Illustrated Times:* "The stalls were filled with gentlemen," whom he pictures as "oiled, curled, white-neckclothed, solemn, inane, every third one of whom might have sat for the portrait of one of Mr. Leech's 'swells.'" The pit was "closely packed with 'genteel' young men, baldheaded old gentlemen, theatrical critics in seedy clothes, and dowdy ladies." [1]

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[1] This announcement is reprinted from an actual playbill published in Clement Scott's *Drama of Yesterday*, i, 5.

[2] Stalls are not evident in what seems to be a late picture of the Lyceum, given in Brereton's history of that theatre.

[3] Baker.

[4] Brereton, *The Lyceum*, pp. 120 ff.

Long before the Bancroft management, then, stalls were widely used in the London theatres. Luxury followed quickly. In 1863 we read that at the Haymarket "chairs covered with velvet" were introduced instead of the "former seats." [2] Moreover, the comfortable pit seats were used elsewhere in the house, for we read in the same paper: "The amphitheatre stalls have been made to correspond to those of the pit." In this respect, then, there was little left for the Wilton-Bancroft management to improve. Miss Wilton, when she took the Prince of Wales's Theatre in 1865, put carpets in the stalls, and added lace antimacassars to the light blue upholstery.[3] In 1876, however, she narrowly averted another O. P. riot when she abolished the entire pit, and raised the price of the stalls to ten shillings.

This apparently insignificant change had its influence, and a considerable one, in developing the actor's technique. It confronted him with an unimpassioned array of listeners in place of the "live humanity" of the pit; and caused him to modify the boisterous, declamatory style of earlier years to suit this altered condition. It made still more effective the quieter and more natural style of acting, which, as we shall see later, many other causes were bringing about on the stage. No wonder the actors of the old school complained when their rantings fell flat; but they should have comforted themselves with the reflection that what they lost, their art gained. This very improvement was one of the most important dramatic influences of the period we are studying.

The stage, also, was modified during the period, but not to the same extent as the eighteenth-century platform. When Drury Lane and Covent Garden were rebuilt after 1790, the great "apron" (the part of the platform before the curtain) was much reduced. The part behind the proscenium was used correspondingly more, and the "apron" less, in the acting. Garrick had already abolished the practice of having "gentlemen" sit on the stage. With the reduction of the front stage, the use of the stage doors became less necessary to the action. They were not abandoned entirely, however, for many years. The *Times*, to be sure, in announcing the opening performance of the new Drury Lane Theatre in 1794, states clearly that "the part of the stage which is contained between the curtain and the orchestra is fitted up with boxes but without any stage door, or the usual addition of large columns." [1] In all the prints of the Sheridan Theatre I have seen such doors, nevertheless, appear. They may perhaps have been added later to satisfy the actors, who undoubtedly found them personally advantageous in heightening the effect of entrances. When the theatre was again rebuilt in 1812, the stage doors were again omitted. "Two Schanoli Corinthian pillars, whose capitals are richly gilded" were said to support the proscenium arch, and "a golden tripod lamp" was placed "on each side, where the stage doors appear in other theatres, which are here altogether dispensed with." [1] The plans and sketches of the new theatre of 1812 confirm this statement. In 1814 the tripods were removed and boxes put in their places.[2] At the same time the Corinthian columns were removed to improve the acoustics, "affording to the architect the opportunity of indulging the performers in their favorite wish of stage doors." [3] The effect of all these changes was further to limit the use of the "apron" for acting. The *Inquisitor* remarks:

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[1] *The Lounger Papers*, quoted in the Life of T. W. Robertson.

[2] *Theat. Obs.*, Sept. 18, 1863.

[3] *The Bancrofts*, p. 63.

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[1] *Times*, March 13, 1794.

[2] *Theat. Inquis.*, Oct., 1812.

[3] *Ibid.*, Sept., 1814, p. 196.

> The alteration of the proscenium has certainly produced great advantage in the scenic effect. . . . Before, the spectator measured by his eye the distance between the front lamps and the scenery, and the performers appeared to act in a large intermediate space; now, by the introduction of the proscenium boxes, the performers are carried back in their action to a line parallel to the new stage doors, by which they are blended with the perspective of the scenery; and the depth of the picture frame formed by the proscenium is, in appearance, lessened by half.

The stage doors were definitely dispensed with at Drury Lane when it was remodeled by Elliston in 1822. A prologue written by Colman and spoken at the reopening of the theatre in that year is a valuable commentary on the use of these entrances:

> Nor blame him [Elliston] for transporting from his floors
> Those old offenders here, the two stage doors,
> Doors which have oft with burnished panels stood,
> And golden knockers glittering in a wood,
> Which on their posts through every change remained,
> Fast as Bray's Vicar, whosoever reign'd;
> That served for palace, cottage, street, or hall,
> Used for each place, and out of place in all.[1]

Another curious convention of the London stage that passed during our period of study was the use of the green carpet of tragedy. I have found little precise information on this subject. In the eighteenth century it appears to have been the recognized announcement that a tragedy was to be performed: it protected the costumes of the dying and created a spell which the scenery itself was inadequate to evoke. With the improvement of scenic effect, however, this custom not only lost its value, but became glaringly inappropriate as well. By 1856 the carpet had been reduced to a strip of green baize stretched only between the footlights and the curtain, as is made clear by an answer to a critical correspondent in the *The-*

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, Oct. 16, 1822.

atrical Journal.[1] No green carpet, the editor declares, "would be laid down on the stage during the entire performance of such a play as *King Lear*, *Henry IV*, or any other play where there were such variations of scenery as W. Thomas states." The editor then proceeds to defend the practice, remarking, "We do not object in the least to the green baize; for it has become such a matter of use with us, that if it were dispensed with, we should scarcely believe that a tragedy was about to be represented." He asserts, however, that this carpet was laid down only between the footlights and "the first entrance on the stage."

Strangely slow were the improvements made in lighting — slower, it would seem, than necessary. Footlights had come in under Garrick, who replaced the six chandeliers of twelve candles each, that had previously hung over the stage, by concealed lamps and footlights.[2] The lights in the auditorium were never lowered, so that the chief improvement of the Garrick change was to remove what must have been a very fatiguing glare in the faces of the spectators. The auditorium was lighted by clusters of candles placed at intervals about the galleries, and beneath the stage boxes.

Although gas was introduced in London in 1809, it did not replace the candles and lamps of the theatre until 1815. Baker says that it was first used at the Olympic by Elliston in that year. From the *Theatrical Inquisitor*, it would appear, however, that only "the saloon had been lighted by gas."[3] In this same year it was proposed for Drury Lane, but fear of poisoning from the fumes delayed its introduction for two years.[4] Then it was introduced on the stage and the first gas chandelier was placed

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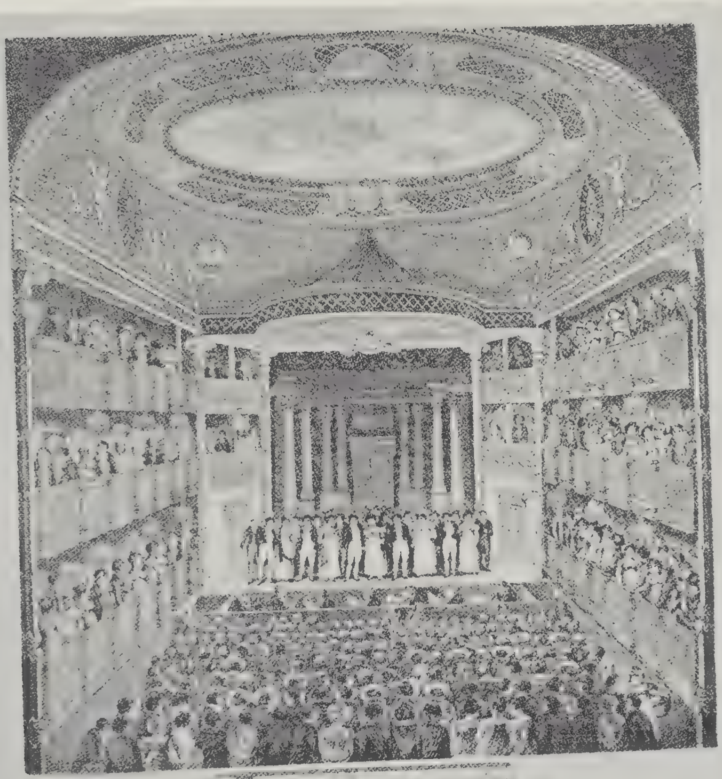
[1] Feb. 6, 1856.

[2] See Baker, pp. 126 ff.

[3] *Theat. Inquis.*, Oct., 1815, p. 329.

[4] Letter from Byron to Moore, June 12, 1815, Camelot ed. of Byron Letters, p. 81.



Opening of the New Haymarket Theatre, 1821

From a contemporary print

in the centre of the auditorium,[1] with splendid effect. These changes were not, however, regarded as unmixed blessings by the audience. In the *Theatrical Observer* for January 18, 1822, we read: "An unpleasant smell arises in the upper part of the house on account of the gas. But the evil is not confined to the smell; the color of the light emitted casts a ghost-like tinge over the countenance divine."

The effect of the lighting, at this time, was decidedly unfavorable to nicety of acting. A great blaze of light continued in the auditorium throughout the performance. No attempt was made at concentration, except for the extremely unnatural glare of gas footlights upon the face of the actors, rising in such a manner as merely to distort their facial expression. A discussion of these faults in the *Theatrical Observer* makes it clear that they were generally recognized.

> It would be ridiculous to deny [one writer asserts] that in the present state of the stage pictorial effects are of the first importance; indeed, when called to the aid of poetical imagination, there is no reason why they should not rank high and be essential to the drama. . . . A very little ingenuity would enable the light to be cast principally or even solely on any single object, the beauty of which would soon be found in all spectral attempts, which, as they are now managed, are generally the most abortive of the dramatic art. The nymphs in *The Tempest* might swim in indistinct moonlight, the witches in *Macbeth* might glower over the murky flame of the caldron, and the ghost in *Hamlet* walk surrounded by a halo of dim light.[2]

Later, the writer continued his suggestions and stated that

> the disposition of the lamps at present, is such that no shadow whatever can be presented to the audience, everything upon

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[1] *Times*, Aug. 27, 1817. See also Baker, p. 415.

[2] No. 1491, Sept. 15, 1826.

> the stage and in the audience part, is a glare of undistinguished lights, painful to the eye, and adding in no small degree to the fatigue of a five hours' entertainment. A more concentrated light would be truly refreshing to the spectator, and would give the objects on the stage the utmost beauty of which they are capable, by allowing in them some degree of shadow. . . . If the footlights and lustres in front do not reduce the features of the performers to one unmeaning blank . . . they do worse, for by the predominance of light at the feet of the performer, the shadows are necessarily thrown upwards, and the effect is, therefore, precisely contrary to the intentions of nature — some of the finest and most correct expressions become by this false shadowing, ludicrous, and stage faces are therefore forced upon the actor, instead of allowing him to leave his countenance to its natural play.[1]

It is curious that such well-recognized defects should have continued with no important changes until 1860. At that time Fechter sank the "floats" (footlights) beneath the stage, but apparently did not introduce from Paris an innovation that had recently been made on the French stage of "overhead lights and reflectors to replace the footlight system." [2] Dutton Cook, writing as late as 1881, tells us that "beyond increasing the quantity of light, stage management has done little since Garrick's introduction of footlights or 'floats,' as they are technically termed. . . . The light still comes from the wrong place: from below instead of, naturally, from above." [3]

In 1849, however, one improvement was made, and probably introduced shortly afterwards at most theatres, in the way of a device which put the gas "wholly under the control of the prompter." [4] Surely under the management of Charles Kean the lowering of lights on the stage was done with ease and much variety of effects: especially successful were his ghost scenes. The main defects, however, which had been handed down on the English stage at the beginning of our period extended through and beyond it. They were a blaze of light in the auditorium, and a marked disfigurement of the actor's countenance because of the stage lighting. That such failings had a serious effect upon the actor's art there can be no doubt. Not only did they impair the acting, but they were in a measure responsible for the annoying attitude of audiences. Those familiar with the French stage were aware of this disadvantage as early as 1815, as the following comparison in the *Theatrical Inquisitor* of the Parisian with English theatres proves. The writer who had just returned from Paris confessed that he was at first disappointed with the French theatres because of the absence of evening dress and ladies, and the want of music. Soon he discovered that this loss of brilliancy in the audience was more than offset by the increased effect of the play. He says:

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, no. 1493.

[2] *Ibid.*, March 21, 1861.

[3] Dutton Cook, *A Book of the Play*, pp. 99 ff.

[4] *Theat. Jour.*, Dec. 13, 1849.

> You feel soon instructed to observe that the moderate quantity of light bestowed upon the body of the house, compared with that which is properly thrown upon the performers, leaves very little of that eternal incitement to restlessness . . . which arises amid the many-colored glare and lustre of Covent Garden and Drury Lane. . . . No frivolous or unruly interruptions, no drunken scuffles, no gallery brutalities strike upon the senses, and tear up the rooted decency and decorum of the Théâtre Français.

If such was the advantage of proper lighting to the French art in 1815, is it not a pity that the English stage should have had to struggle for the next forty years with so unnecessary a handicap? Thus powerful is, or was, English stage convention.

In general, then, we may say that the first seventy years of the nineteenth century contributed little to the improvement of the playhouse histrionically. Changes which affected acting were: a gradual disuse of the stage "apron"; an improvement in the audience as a result of introducing orchestra stalls; and a slight betterment of lighting effects through the use of a great chandelier in the audience part of the house.

Chapter V

THE COMMAND OF AUDIENCES

A WISE precaution, if the tradition may be trusted, caused Molière to read his plays to an ignorant old woman before he tried them in the public playhouse, because, he said, where she laughed, his audiences would laugh also. It would perhaps have been well if more of the dramatists of the nineteenth century in England had applied this austere test. Those who wrote most pretentiously for the public appear to have known little or cared little about it. Before we can approach understandingly the work presented to it by actor, manager, or writer, we must examine its habits a little more closely than we have yet had occasion to do.

It was a public betimes. Before 1817, half-past six was the conventional hour for the curtain to rise. In that year, as a concession to high life, seven o'clock was substituted.[1] The opera began always at eight. The minor theatres kept hours suited to their position in the social scale, as the following time-table [2] for 1832 indicates:

Italian opera at 8.
Drury Lane and Covent Garden at 7.
Queen's, Adelphi, and Strand at 6.45.
Surrey and Sadler's Wells at 6.30.
Coburg at 6.15.

No regular hour was set for closing, but the practice was generally to keep the audience amused until midnight. It was considered revolutionary, in 1831, for Vestris to close at eleven, a practice which she began and continued at her Olympic Theatre. The Haymarket was notoriously late in closing. In 1827 the *Theatrical Observer* complained that this theatre had usually three and sometimes four long pieces each evening, and that it rarely closed before 12.30.[1] On another occasion this critic declared with disgust that the Haymarket kept open until two o'clock. Moncrieff, whose business it was to supply the light farce to be used as the eye-opener at the end of the evening, assures us that his was no enviable lot.[2]

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[1] Genest, viii, 651.

[2] Leigh Hunt's *Tatler*.

Another custom was "half price." At its worst this practice meant the opening of the doors at nine o'clock to those wishing to pay only half price for admission. It mattered not at all whether a play was in progress; the scramble for seats interrupted tragedy, comedy, or burlesque, without distinction. A riot had forced this outrage upon Garrick, and no one had since had the boldness to end it. In 1817, to be sure, Arnold at the Lyceum attempted a compromise arrangement of having two separate performances, with a half hour's intermission. In this way the management hoped to satisfy a fashionable world that preferred a late hour. Admission to the pit for each performance was the same, two shillings. The first night, however, when the curtain fell at the end of the first performance, a large part of the pit refused to leave, and although the lights were turned out, kept up a hubhub, until the management announced that they might remain if they were unwilling to pay the second price. No doubt this privilege was made the most of later, although the first few evenings only a few "pittites" were "contemptible" enough to remain.[3] At the other theatres this practice was not adopted, but they at least arranged to have the entrance of the half-price audience, during the intermission, nearest to nine o'clock.

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[1] No. 1777, Aug. 20, 1827. The writer of this article, who boasted of familiarity with the stage for thirty years, stated that before 1817 eleven o'clock was considered late.

[2] See Introduction to *The Elbow-Shakers*, Richardson's "Minor Drama," 1828.

[3] *Theat. Inquis.*, Sept., 1817, pp. 233 ff.

Before the Bancrofts, audiences were not indulged in matinée performances, except on the rarest occasions, as, for instance, during the rage for G. V. Brooke at Drury Lane in 1853–54. The Bancrofts gave afternoon performances of *School*, *Peril*, and *A Happy Pair*, but did not make the practice permanent before the run of *Diplomacy* at the Haymarket in 1878.

A kind of mirror was held up to the audiences of our period in the bills of the play sold for a penny to the patrons. Judging from the size and beauty of these documents, they were worth the price. A study of these alone would make a valuable contribution to the understanding of this period. There are several large collections of them, the most important being that of the British Museum. The Theatre Collection in the Harvard College Library is astonishingly complete and valuable. There are many more that I have not inspected. Smaller collections are to be found at the London theatrical clubs, like the Garrick and the O. P. Of the many interesting changes indicated on these bills none is of more interest to us than the gradual abandonment of the triple bill, which had been the frequent practice in the early century. Under Kean's management at the Princess's was definitely substituted a double bill consisting of a curtain-raiser and the "production" of the evening. Under the Bancrofts, even the curtain-raiser was discontinued.

These changes were indicative of more than a mere fancy of the management: they reflected rapidly changing theatrical conditions. Had such an attempt been made earlier, a riot might have been expected. Even in the case of the sumptuous spectacle, called *The Life of Bonaparte*, given in 1831, which piece contained six long acts, the *Theatrical Observer* thought it a risky venture without an afterpiece. So it proved, for in a few days a farce was added.[1] The only other attempt of the kind before Miss Wilton's management, so far as I know, was that of Fechter's *Hamlet.*

A triple bill of long pieces was by no means the regular practice at any time, for if two five-act plays were to be given, no farce would be added. The majors, for the most part, seem to have given two long pieces rather than three short ones. At the Haymarket, on the other hand, the triple bill was the usual practice, and was the cause of its late hours, to which we have already referred. As early as 1825 the *Theatrical Observer,*[1] whose sleep was seriously interfered with on this account, grumbled that this was "really too much, and prejudicial to the interests as well as the character [!] of a theatre."[2]

A glance at the following programs as announced by bills for the year 1832, taken quite at random, shows that there was no great regularity as to the number of performances in a single evening, except that at the minors there were usually three, and at the majors there were three when some of the plays were short:

For Tuesday, May 1, 1832: Drury Lane, *The Merchant of London*, *The Magic Car* (spectacle). Covent Garden, *The Hunchback*, *The Tartar Witch and the Pedlar Boy* (spectacle). Surrey, *The Death-light* (melodrama), *Bombastes Furioso* (extravaganza), *The Proscribed One* (melodrama).

For May 10, 1832: Drury Lane, *The Tyrolese Peasant* (domestic opera), *The Brigand* (melodrama), *Masaniello* (opera). Covent Garden, *The Hunchback*, *Midas* (burletta). Surrey, *The Death-light* (melodrama), *One! Two! Three! Four! Five!* (farce), *Eugene Aram* (domestic drama).

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, May 9, 1831.

[2] No. 1221, Nov. 4, 1825.

For May 12, 1832: Drury Lane, *The Tyrolese Peasant*, *The Rent Day*, *The Beggar's Opera.*

For May 22, 1832: Covent Garden, *Guy Mannering* (opera), *X. Y. Z.* (farce). Coburg, *Isaure* (melodrama), *Don Juan*, *Guy Mannering* (musical burlettas). Queen's, *Venice Preserved*, *Rosina*, *The Weathercock.*

For May 26, 1832: Drury Lane, *Man of the World*, *The Rent Day*, *Rugantino* (drama). Surrey, *The Rising Sun*, *George Barnwell*, *The Death-light.*

It is useless to multiply instances. I have based my statements upon the inspection of many bills covering all parts of the period, and I cite these merely as interesting examples of what one may learn at a glance from the playbills as to the character of performances and the taste of audiences.

The improvement of these bills in appearance was strikingly indicative of a change of tone in the audience. They developed during our period from huge, coarse, poster-like sheets, printed in great letters, and with ink that never was dry until at least a day after the performance, to something approaching present-day programs. Not until 1858 do we learn that at Covent Garden was introduced a neatly printed program, "which will not discolor the glove at the very first touch as heretofore." [1]

"Puffing" was another indication of the progress of audiences. In the early century it was too blatant, it would seem, to deceive anyone. There are a few interesting instances for which we have the antidote of fact as well as the "puff." For instance, regarding the puff applied to "a miserable French melodrama more miserably translated by a most miserable writer," to quote the genial critic of the *Inquisitor*, this gentleman asks:

> What must our readers think of the matchless insolence of the managers, who stated in the playbill of the next day, that

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, Dec. 20, 1858.

> it had been received with "delight, amazement, and acclamation," adding with triumphant defiance, that it would be performed every evening till further notice!! On what grounds these gentlemen pretend to establish the assertion of its being well received, we know not, for certain it is the piece was unanimously damned.[1]

When we remember what it meant for a piece to be damned, the boldness of this defiance is hard to explain. The arch-offender, however, was Elliston. Even Hazlitt's heavy guns were turned on him for his insolence. It was the more obnoxious, because Elliston abused the managements of the very theatres in which he had himself committed the offences he attacked. In one case his puff read:

> This theatre overflows every night. The patentees cannot condescend to enter into any competition of scurrility, which is only fitted for minor theatres — what their powers really are will be, without any public appeal, legally decided in November next, and any gasconade can only be supposed to be caused by cunning or poverty.

Hazlitt returned the fire for the minors: "A more heartless piece of bravado we do not remember to have witnessed. This theatre does not overflow every night!"

In this respect, as in many others, Macready was the manager first to take a decided stand. Vestris, too, renounced the practice. Shortly after their important managements, however, a new kind of puffing was introduced, which seemed to be equally offensive to the critic Lewes. Charles Mathews at the Lyceum was said to be responsible. Said Lewes: "[He] has set a wretched example, and one may now expect all managers to make the playbill a fly-sheet of criticism and erudition, unless a little timely ridicule warn them of their danger." [2] If Mathews was the originator, Charles Kean chiefly profited by this species of advertisement. The bill for each of his ela-

[1] *Theat. Inquis.*, Oct., 1815, p. 329.

[2] *Leader*, Feb. 19, 1853.

borate and "historically correct" productions contained a lengthy and pedantic treatise on the costumes and scenic effects. Many of these are reprinted in Cole's *Life and Theatrical Times of Charles Kean*.

That even in the sixties the taste of audiences was not of the most exalted order appears from the annoying habit of facetious comment on the characters in the play. The following vulgarity appears on a bill in the O. P. Club collection. The announcement was of a performance of *Faust* at the St. James's, Saturday, July 9, 1864. Marguerite, we learn, is "a young person in a very humble sphere of life [who] possesses in the corpulent Siebel, one lover whom she thinks nothing of ousting for the sake of Faust." Of Dame Martha it says, "[She] is a mediæval or middle-aged widow; a lodging-house keeper, who 'lets out' rooms, and, being heartlessly deceived 'lets out' to Mephistopheles, whom she has marked out for a husband, but fails in taking a good shot, being a bad dame." When Mr. Shaw upbraided Mr. Augustine Daly for importing again into England what was once an English specialty, the critic felt himself outraged by such mild characterizations as "a polished relic of wasted energies," "not half a bad sort of parent, and an excellent judge of Latour '70." "What," exclaimed the habitually indignant Mr. Shaw, "is to be done with Mr. Daly? How shall we open his mind to the fact that he stands on the brink of the twentieth century in London, and not with Mr. Vincent Crummles at Portsmouth in the early Dickens days?"[1] It was not in Portsmouth or in the early Dickens days, but in London and in the eighteen-sixties, that we read on the program of a performance of one of the great world tragedies that its heroine thought "nothing of ousting one lover for the sake of" another! In the main, however, both in form and convenience, the bills of the sixties were a marked improvement over those of the first dec-

[1] *Dramatic Opinions and Essays*, i, 153.

ades of the century, and the improvement at least suggests a more fastidious public to read them.

Another indication of the make-up of audiences was the excessive freedom with which "orders" were used to fill the benches and the boxes. We have already seen the effect of this abuse upon the moral complexion of the theatre-going public. The playhouses, indeed, were used before Macready, without hindrance of any sort, as the traffic halls of vice. The less offensive use of "orders" to fill the empty pit gave a tone of insincerity to the audiences, which was in turn hardly less detrimental to the art of the stage. Macready, who put a stop to the traffic with the underworld, seems not to have been above the use of "orders" to give the appearance of success to his failing management. The first active measures against this abuse were taken by Charles Mathews, Junior, in 1853. He announced that he would abolish the practice of "orders" at the Lyceum. He estimated an annual loss to his treasury of five thousand pounds because of the "orders" issued through the regular channels of the press and the workers for the theatre. He believed, further, that the practice had gone so far as to amount to the free entertainment of a large part of the public. Lewes in the *Leader* gave him support, and publicly stated:

> We have resolved, in common with the most respected of our contemporaries, to discontinue the use of the press privilege of writing orders of admission to the theatre and other places of amusement. Henceforth no such orders will be issued from this office to any person, whether connected with the *Leader* or not.[1]

Previously there seems to have been hardly any restriction placed upon the freedom of the press in issuing "orders" when and to whom it liked. It is difficult to imagine anything more demoralizing to a business, especially when that business is in support of an art. The *Theatrical*

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[1] *Leader*, Jan. 15, 1853.

Journal, which was among the periodicals opposing the change, took exception to Mathews's statement of his losses, frankly declaring that of the ten thousand people annually admitted to his house by "orders," not more than a third would have attended if they had been obliged to pay the regular price. The writer even robbed Mathews of the honor of starting the reform, which, he states, was instituted by Albert Smith. Included in his violent protest were many charges reflecting upon Mathews's treatment of audiences. "Cease charging," the writer urged, "the exorbitant sum of one shilling for booking box seats (paying for being a customer), and abolish the fees demanded by bears that prowl about the boxes, for putting you into a seat where you can see what is taking place on the stage. These are the abuses that call loudest for reform." [1] One interesting form of order issued in about the year 1835 was as follows:

> ROYAL . . . THEATRE. November and during the month. — Admit the bearer and friends to the pit, on paying threepence each; or the boxes, on paying sixpence each. Noisy children not admitted, pattens to be taken off. — N. B. *Coriolanus* will be played to-morrow.[2]

The *Theatrical Journal*, in defending the right of the press to issue "orders," made clear that in 1853 they were no longer issued for the pit. The pit, then, seems first to have become honest and prosperous, and the boxes last. Let us not jump to the conclusion, however, that Charles Mathews succeeded in dispensing with orders altogether. Never again, at least, were audiences so sodden with deadheads as before the reforms instituted by him in 1853.

We must rise in society and see the Queen at the theatre. No rulers of England except Elizabeth and Victoria seem to have taken the stage seriously. We are called upon in the case of "Gloriana" to imagine her in a conjectured visit to the Globe. Fortunately we have Victoria within easy reach, and it is refreshing to find that her theatre-going was of a human sort. Before Victoria royal attendance was most formal. A "commanded" performance was always imposingly announced in the *Theatrical Observer*, and vast throngs were thereby allured to the theatres, bringing with them the happiest of results to the managers' coffers. On such occasions the royal box was elaborately decorated. The singing of the national anthem was attended with an amazing display of patriotic enthusiasm and loyalty to the monarch. A quaint custom demanded that the manager of the theatre, in court costume, should present himself at the theatre door, with two candlesticks, to welcome the royal guests and conduct them to their places in the box. The etiquette of the ceremony required that he should walk backward to the anteroom. Buckstone, who was ever a favorite of the Queen, usually began the comedy of the evening — but quite unintentionally — before he had finished his duties as royal page. The corridor in this theatre was dark and tortuous and gave occasion for the display of much human frailty common to humble manager and royal mistress. Once, as the great doors opened, a gust of wind blew out both his candles. "Now just look at that!" said "Bucky" with outward calm, and conducted the party through the dark passage, giving no other clue to his whereabouts than the odor of the smoking wicks. We are told that the performance had to be long delayed for her Majesty to recover from her wholesome merriment. On another occasion "Bucky" had still worse luck. He tripped, fell flat on his back, but still had composure enough to exclaim, "Now just look at that!"[1]

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[1] The practice here referred to had survived from the beginning of our period. The quotation is from the *Journal*, Jan. 19, 1853.

[2] *Theat. Obs.*, no. 4347, Nov. 23, 1835.

[1] See Cyril Maude, *The Haymarket Theatre*, p. 146.

In the impressionistic account of an early-century audience in which I indulged at the beginning of the chapter on the playhouse, I included the universal practice of "giving out" or announcing a play for repetition. In this custom lay the official opportunity for audience and management to "have it out." Even now an audience occasionally rises in wrath and condemns a piece at its first London performance, but the occurrence is so rare as to be negligible. In the early nineteenth century there was no such delicacy. When the manager or his representative appeared after a new piece, "to give it out for repetition," his entrance was the signal for outspoken opinion. The audience revelled in the prerogative. The ferocity with which the public pronounced sentence was a major cause for diffidence on the part of literary men who might otherwise have written for the stage. Similarly, a great success on the part of actor or playwright met with an imposing tribute difficult for us now to conceive. The condemnation, however, and the praise alike, were entirely too violent for the merits of any performance so passed upon. The verdict rendered by the audience was final and without appeal. No manager with safety could disregard it. The logic sanctioning this condemnation was sound enough. If the state imposed a monopoly, it was the business of those who enjoyed its privileges to provide entertainment satisfactory to a public that had no choice but to attend the monopoly houses. Probably the custom had grown out of the monopoly, and its abatement has perhaps resulted partly from free theatres. Damning, however, as a force in the dramatic world continued far beyond the end of our period.

Elliston, as we have already observed, attempted frequently to defy the popular judgment. He did not always come off so successfully as in the instance mentioned above with regard to puffing. In 1821 he repeated his offence after the failure of a piece purporting to be a sequel to *Giovanni in London*, which had just completed a phenomenal run. Although his *Giovanni in Ireland*, in spite of costly outfitting, was unconditionally damned, he boldly put it on a second night. His audience greeted the attempt with a riot, and the piece was withdrawn at once.[1]

This excessive show of wrath more than almost any other cause deterred young writers, who otherwise might have found the stage congenial, from undergoing the ordeal of a first night. Byron, for instance, had this custom in mind when he wrote in the preface to *Marino Faliero:*

> I have had no view to the stage; in its present state it is not, perhaps, a very exalted object of ambition. . . . I cannot conceive of any man of irritable feelings, putting himself at the mercies of an audience. The sneering reader, the loud critic, the tart review are scattered and distant calamities; but the trampling of an intelligent or of an ignorant audience upon a production, which, be it good or bad, had been a mental labor to the writer, is a palpable and immediate grievance heightened by a man's doubt of their competency to judge, and his certainty of his own imprudence in electing them as his judges. Were I capable of writing a play which should be deemed stageworthy, success would give me little or no pleasure, and failure great pain. It is for this reason that during the time of being one of the committee of one of the theatres, I never made the attempt and never will.

This feeling testimony was not, however, from first-hand experience. From the gentle Charles Lamb, a *bona fide* victim, we gain more eloquent testimony. First let us read what he had to say deliberately at the end of the season during which, as he declared, no less than two tragedies, four comedies, one opera, and three farces — of which his own was one — had been damned at Drury Lane.[2]

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, Dec. 31, 1821.

[2] Lamb appears to exaggerate. Only ten new plays were given that season at Drury Lane, and only four are reported to have failed.

> It did appear to some [he wrote in 1811] that the measure of the popular tribunal at that period savoured of harshness and the *summum jus*. The public mouth was early in the season fleshed upon the *Vindictive Man*, and some piece of that nature, and it retained through the remainder of it a relish for blood. As Dr. Johnson would have said, "Sir, there was a habit of sibilation in the house."

Then speaking more generally of the custom:

> Against the *manner* in which the public on these occasions think fit to deliver their disapprobation, I must, and ever will protest.
>
> Sir, imagine a vast theatre . . . filled with all sorts of disgusting sounds, — shrieks, groans, hisses, but chiefly the last, like the noise of many waters, or that Don Quixote heard from the fulling mills, or that wilder combination of devilish sounds which St. Anthony listened to in the wilderness.
>
> Seriously, *Messieurs the Public*, this outrageous way you have got of expressing your displeasure, is too much for the occasion. When I was deafening under the effects of it, I could not help asking, what crime of great moral turpitude I had committed; for every man about me seemed to feel the offence as personal to himself, as something which public interest and private feelings alike called upon him in the strongest possible manner to stigmatize with infamy.

Lamb then particularizes, incidentally giving much interesting information about the make-up of English audiences:

> First, there is the common English snake. — This is the part of the auditory which are always the majority at damnations, but who have no critical venom in themselves to sting them on, stay till they hear others hiss, and join in the ceremony. . . .
>
> The Rattle Snake. — These are your obstreperous talking critics, — impertinent guides of the pit, — who will not give a plain man leave to enjoy an evening's entertainment, but with their frothy jargon, and incessant finding of faults, either

> drown their pleasure quite, or force him, in his own defence to join in their clamorous censure. The hiss always originates with these.[1]

More bitter, without one touch of irony, was Lamb's first cry of resentment:

> Damn 'em, how they hissed! It was not a hiss, neither, but a sort of frantic yell like a congregation of wild geese, with roaring, sometimes, like bears, mows and mops like apes, sometimes snakes that hissed me into madness. 'T was like St. Anthony's temptations. Mercy on us that God should give his favourite children, men, mouths to speak with, to discourse rationally, to promise smoothly, to flatter agreeably, to encourage warmly, to counsel wisely, to sing with, to drink with, and to kiss with, and that they should turn them into mouths of adders, bears, wolves, hyenas, and whistle like tempests, and emit breath through them like distillations and aspic poisons, to asperse and vilify the innocent labours of their fellow-creatures who are desirous to please them.[2]

Has any dramatic author in recent years had occasion to empty his heart like this?[3] Diminishing box receipts, brutal managers, — if there are such things, — ranting critics, and the whole paraphernalia of condemnation in these days, are but motherly rebuke in comparison to the hell-broil to which the dramatist was subjected from 1800 to 1870. Knowles, Bulwer, Jerrold, Thackery, Dickens, and even Robertson, heard the hiss of this merciless serpent.

There is hardly a more pathetic scene in all literary history than the one enacted at the dying Robertson's bedside. He had sent his little son to occupy his box at the theatre while his last play, *War*, written at the very close of our period, was given its only hearing. A more brutal and disheartening condemnation of a play is not recorded in the century. Robertson drew from the reluctant lips of the little fellow the whole sad tale. His reply is memorable: "Ah, Tommy, my boy, they would n't be so hard if they could see me now. I shan't trouble them again." Thus intensified by the presence of death, Robertson's words seemed to express the heartache and anguish of soul with which audiences rewarded those brave literary spirits who did their utmost to give the public a few hours of entertainment. Here we put a finger upon one certain cause for the paucity of great and sensitive men of intellect among the writers for the English stage.

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[1] Essay on "The Custom of Hissing at the Theatres."

[2] Letter to Mr. Manning, printed in the notes to vol. I of E. V. Luca's edition of Lamb's Works, p. 412.

[3] Henry James in 1895 experienced similar hostility. He described the demonstration as "a battle of the most gallant, prolonged and sustained applause with the hoots and jeers and catcalls of the roughs, whose *roars* (like those of a cage of beasts at some infernal 'zoo') were only exacerbated (as it were) by the conflict." Letter to William James in *Letters of Henry James*, vol. I, p. 227.

So far we have enumerated influences peculiar to our period which affected audiences, and we have also reviewed those characteristics of audiences which were exhibited to a more marked degree during the first half of the nineteenth century than at any other time. Much of this change in temper was no doubt the result of what in the chapter on "London Life and the Stage" we called the coming of the new theatrical democracy. This result, we noted, was often considered the fault of large theatres and their coarsening influence. Managers complained unceasingly that only their pit and galleries were occupied, and these only partially. Above and beyond all this lay the great fact that a new type of British public had come into existence, which as yet did not understand itself and, in turn, was not understood by those who sought to entertain it with literary drama.

We are, of course, in danger of overestimating this change in the English audience from the "palmy days" of Garrick, or Quin, or Betterton. Each generation bestows upon the generations twice removed a reverence which is not always their due. So persistent, however, was the contempt for the present when compared with the past, shown by all who wrote from a knowledge of both, that we must feel certain of an appreciable decline. It may be well for us to adjust our perspective by a glance at the preceding century before we pursue this topic further. Audiences of the early eighteenth century, as seen, for instance, through the eyes of Addison, appeared hardly less childish than those of the days of Kean and Macready. Their predilections were strangely similar. The critics who reproached the London public for choosing Ducrow and his horses at Drury Lane in preference to Macready's Macbeth, were in reality repeating Addison's lament of a century previous concerning Nicolini's fight with a man in a lion's skin which was thus worded: "Audiences have often been reproached by writers for coarseness of their taste; but our present grievance does not seem to be want of good taste, but of common sense." [1] As late as 1753, Colman or Thornton, writing in the *Connoisseur*, described vain courtiers on the stage, courtesans in the lower boxes as well as the upper, and censured the upper, which now was indiscriminate in its applause, because it was "without the trunk-maker of former days." This character is familiar to readers of the *Spectator* and *Tatler* as the old fellow in the balcony who directed the applause of that part of the house by thumping loudly with his cane. The writer recommended that gallery audiences "had better now keep to the minor office of watching that the lights are properly snuffed, and the music not too long." It is interesting, however, to note that he mentions definitely the good qualities of audiences of the day, which were generally supposed to be wanting in the audiences of the early nineteenth century, for he speaks of the "honest middle gallery folk" and of "the pit that passes judgment on wit and art." [2]

[1] *Spectator*, no. 13.

[2] *Connoisseur*, no. 43.

Although the pit had continued fully as imperative in the nineteenth century, it was certainly no longer as discriminating as that to which Garrick had to play. The "honest middle gallery folk" were less numerous, and a much larger horde of the uncouth were lodged in the greatly increased upper balconies. If the vain courtiers had retired from the stage, they and all their tribe had withdrawn, except on rare occasions, from the entire theatrical world of the nineteenth century. We must not, however, suppose that in our period the pit was wholly contemptible, or even entirely repeopled. It no doubt continued much the same as in the preceding century, except that the discriminating element that once filled the pit was now mixed with a perhaps greater number of tasteless auditors, a state of affairs that Lamb seemed to refer to in the description of the "common English snake."

If the audience was inferior to that of the previous century, it was certainly no more comfortable at the play. Only toward the end of our period was there any marked improvement in the accommodations for the audience, such as backs to the pit benches, stalls in the orchestra, well-printed programs, carpets, and the numerous other amenities of the present-day playhouse. Another quite needless source of discomfort was the absurd method of seating. Apparently the managers made no effort to limit the size of an audience. Whenever the houses were filled,—fortunately not a frequent occurrence,—the performance would begin amid furious cries of "No room!" "Give us our money!" "Robbers!" or even more violent signs of dissatisfaction. The manager would frequently ignore the protest, which would drag on through a large part of the play.

With the introduction of stalls the practice of reserving definite seats was probably begun. Previously, not even in the boxes was it customary for places to be so reserved, although, by paying a shilling extra, places might be secured in advance. In general, the purchaser bought a ticket to the part of the house he preferred, and then secured his seat "on the rush." If a man bought admission to a box, he had still to pay a fee to a "bear that prowled about," in order to secure a seat from which he might command a view of the stage.

As late as 1853, the *Theatrical Journal* bitterly attacked the management of the Princess's under Charles Kean, because of this very practice, and recommended that he issue

> a certain number of checks sufficient to occupy all seats and standing-room — that is, such standing room, as from where a view may be obtained, which would do away with a great deal of the crushing now inevitably consequent in effecting an entrance into the lobbies such as is to be found frequently (and ever upon particular occasions) at nearly all the theatres in London — the Princess's more especially than any other.[1]

Through the major part of our period, then, we have to keep in mind an inferior audience, given astonishingly uncomfortable accommodation, witnessing interminable performances, and generally in a state of protest, not only against managers, but against writers, actors, and even the monopoly, by which they felt themselves abused as much as did the "illegitimates."

The case for the British theatre-going public, which I have put none too strongly, should be kept in mind when we speak disparagingly of it, as at times we must. Our purpose, however, is not so much to characterize English audiences as to discern those peculiarities and tendencies among them which, in one way or another, produced an appreciable effect upon the trend of the drama.

One of the most marked of these has always been a dogged refusal to be pleased by anything that John Bull cannot immediately and without reflection enjoy; and hence an almost complete indifference alike to the maledictions of critics and to the sneers of foreign observers. Here lies the chief difference between the English and the French audience, for in the case of the latter, there has always, I believe, even among the meaner sort of audiences, been a disposition not merely to enjoy a play itself, but also to enjoy critically the means by which this enjoyment is produced. To thoughtful Frenchmen nothing is more important in the theatre than art. To thoughtful Anglo-Saxons, except for æsthetes and literati, nothing is perhaps less so. Let an effect be produced, and they care little about the means that produced it. That is why, no doubt, home-made English drama written by Cumberland, Inchbald, Colman, Reynolds, O'Keefe, Holcroft, and Lewis, betrayed hardly a sign of constructive skill, merely serving to set forth episodes with bright dialogue and clever character sketches.

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[1] *Theat. Jour.*, Sept. 7, 1853.

This disposition accounts also, no doubt, for the treatment of Shakespeare's plays. It was not until the romantic critics, like Coleridge and Hazlitt, discovered a hidden craftsmanship in the plays, that anyone, even the most critical, had mistrusted that Shakespeare was more than a spontaneous erratic genius, whose work needed "adapting" before it was presentable "to the refinement of modern audiences." Before Macready, only an occasional critic discovered that the plays as written were infinitely better workmanship than the mangled versions by Cibber, Tate, and the whole crew of Shakespeare-mongers, including Dryden himself. With the English audience the individual gems, whether of wit or emotion, were the telling "points." Actors and playwrights knew this trait well enough, and accordingly neglected all else to satisfy it. Shakespeare, too, had known it. One has only to imagine every particle of structural interest removed from his plays, to realize that what remains would make a charming program, as every public reader knows. Regarded in such fashion, the works of Shakespeare fell perfectly in line with the disposition of the early-century audiences which had not yet been spellbound by the structural methods of France. The education of the British public to an appreciation of a new form is in itself a chief part of our study.

If I have implied that English audiences, because spontaneous, were capable of appreciating a fresh art form at sight, I must modify the impression. Coupled with a critical indifference went a strong conservative tendency of mind — not so strong, perhaps, as might be found in many other countries, and yet an attitude of intolerance toward anything which did not give the kind of satisfaction that audiences expected in the theatre. It is inconceivable, for instance, that Ibsen's *Doll's House* could have escaped damning, had it been presented; not simply because of its menace to the British home, but because it had no "points," in the sense that the great dramatists of England made points. Theatre-goers would have said of it precisely what I once heard two American candy-eating matinée neighbors say of it: "Well, now, did you ever see a play with so little to it?" The fact that it possessed a different and perhaps better technique, would probably not have occurred to an early-nineteenth-century audience and certainly would not have helped to recommend the play. The question would merely have been, "Has the play got the right go to it?" *Vivida vis* was the critical formula. It has, I believe, often wrongly been supposed that a play of literary worth was in itself distasteful to this public. It is an undeniable fact that of all the plays pretending in any way to be more than spectacle, melodrama, or farce, none so constantly and surely satisfied the early-nineteenth-century audience as those which had the greatest literary distinction, namely, the plays of Shakespeare. Audiences were not prejudiced against literary plays, but against plays which were *only* literary. *Vivida vis* they wanted first.

This bit of critical slang, used generally with regard to acting, especially that of Edmund Kean, well expressed "what the public wanted." Vigorous action, intense and even violent emotion, flashing and unmistakable wit, humor that brought an unreflective laugh, striking costumes and scenery, sensation in scenery or action, and a deep coloring of sentiment, appealing directly to the heart. By *vivida vis* was meant the power of the performer to arouse in his public some or all of these pleasurable emotions with power and skill. No limit, I believe, was set by that audience as to the amount of skill, provided the vitality, as they felt it, was present. Every successful dramatist in England, from Shakespeare to Shaw, has recognized these demands, and has been great according to his ability to meet them without losing, as the majority have done, his literary soul.

In the acting of Shakespeare's plays there were numerous effects that the public demanded as a kind of right. If an actor failed to make a "point" where they had been schooled to expect it, he was scored against. They would tolerate new effects, but these must be added to the old, and not detract from them. Similarly, in the traditional comedy, there were certain ways and means of producing the highest comic effect according to theatrical traditions. A comedy which failed to present them, or an interpretation which departed radically from tradition, was, of course, considered "weak," "insipid," "incorrect," or any one of the other forms of disqualification abhorred by the audiences attuned to the wit of Sheridan and the bandying of the "macaroni."

This sort of mob judgment amounted to a conservatism more inexorable than rules of construction. Its principles were, nevertheless, unwritten and vague. No one ever tried to formulate them, and no one could do so. The only school for this dramatic dogma was the pit, where the self-appointed guardians of the British drama sat. Their minds were great storehouses of precedent, not clearly defined or perfectly consistent, but still sufficiently so to shape judgment and impose embarrassing restrictions upon those who wrote and acted. It was the more difficult to please for the very reason of its obscurity. It was not, however, a mentality that drew no distinctions as to type. It proposed standards for each art according to the vaguely accepted precedents. For comedy it expected the Restoration type, as modified by Sheridan and acted by Munden, Emery, and Elliston, or else the sentimental type familiar in the mixed forms of Cumberland and Reynolds, and acted by Mrs. Jordan; in tragedy, as we have seen, it demanded marked effects, produced according to long accretions of precedent, especially under Kemble's influence. The peculiar fondness of this early-century audience for the great Shakespearean tragedies — and English audiences are generally supposed to prefer comedy — is explained, I believe, by this traditional method of enjoying them. For melodrama they soon formulated their standards of expectation. Fond as these audiences seemed to be of melodramas, it must not for an instant be supposed that they believed them superior to Shakespeare's tragedies. The least critical man in the galleries would probably have resented this imputation as an insult. They had their special way of enjoying melodrama, just as they had of enjoying tragedy. The ingenuity, freshness, and intensity of melodrama pleased. They listened to it after their fill of Shakespeare, and perhaps enjoyed it more. It was all a question of *vivida vis*. Melodrama had something to say to this audience. It was not hackneyed and worn and relegated to the lowest of dramatic categories, as is now generally the case. The public therefore welcomed it unblushingly, estimated it above its worth, but, nevertheless, enjoyed it as something new and effective, creating for it a mode of enjoyment which in no wise conflicted with standards of taste in tragedy or comedy. What the canons of this taste were, we shall consider later. It is our purpose at this point merely to note that audiences from the beginning of the century had them, and were insistent upon them. But in spite of them there was much more latitude of judgment regarding the new than in France. A stir like the French welcome to *Hernani* would have been inconceivable in England. If the play had not pleased, it would simply have been damned, and no one would have quoted chapter and verse to prove why.

Amused an English audience must be — forcibly amused. They must forget, while the candles burn, the commonplaceness of their own lives. They must be saved from themselves by the drama. If once an audience could be transported to the realm of fancy, there seemed to be no limit to the amount of dramatic subtlety and beauty it could appreciate; but the spell of enchantment had first to be created, without any process of intellection on the part of the audience.

Granting that this attitude, generally assumed to be bad for the development of drama, has proved detrimental to English dramatic literature, we must still allow that there is much about the Englishman's hardheadedness that has been favorable to the stage. He is invariably honest with himself on the subject of the drama, even if he is not always so with those before whom he discusses himself. If the play does not please, he never pretends that it does. Nor does it matter to him whether the fault is his or somebody else's. His critics may grumble and his enemies laugh: he merely sits at home and allows his critics and enemies to enjoy by themselves the art they praise. Conversely, if he enjoys an entertainment, of any character whatsoever, all the authority on earth cannot deny him that pleasure. Not only that, but he must see or hear it over and over again — his thirst for it is insatiable. "To convince any man against his will," said Dr. Johnson, "is hard, but to please him against his will is justly pronounced by Dryden to be above the reach of human abilities." If this observation is true of all men, it is especially true of the Englishman, and never so influentially true as when that Englishman seeks pleasure in his theatre.

Exasperating, perhaps, but easily calculable, this disposition has its value for manager and playwright alike. A trick that has once pleased an English audience may be counted upon to succeed for an amazing length of time. If an author has given pleasure by a novel turn of wit, he may repeat his device, with little variation, for an indefinite succession of performances: it might be truer to say, he must repeat it, for nothing different will please the public expectation he has created. The English dramatist is, therefore, one of the few fortunates who can eat their cake and have it too. Many, like the unhappy Planché, however, have found this opportunity a mixed blessing, and have grown heartily sick of their own cooking.

The quality of English audiences that has perhaps troubled the critics most — especially Dryden, Addison, Hunt, Hazlitt, Archer, and Shaw — is the childlike readiness to be pleased with the tinsels and trappings of the drama, and with action that befits rather the circus than the stage. If these critics have also been playwrights, they have often yielded to this disposition, mixing with weightier matter unmistakable buffooneries. Audiences, true to their instincts, have eaten the frosting, but have left untouched the carefully prepared cake beneath. So probably it was with Shakespeare. But if much was neglected and overlooked, much more was grasped and enjoyed. It requires no great genius to entertain with sentimentality, puns, and buffoonery, although really to entertain an audience by these means is not, perhaps, as easy as those who never have tried it suppose. It requires the very loftiest genius, however, to interest anyone with highly conceived drama, especially the poetical drama. So lofty, in truth, that only one has appeared in the English theatre for a space of three hundred years, capable of satisfying completely that same childlike, yet highly exacting taste. What the showman accomplishes before the public with comparative ease, the literary workman does only with the greatest difficulty. What, after all, is more difficult than for a mind opened to a world of thought and vision, to express itself to the great soul of humanity through the vulgar medium of the popular sense? And where does that sense-medium become more excessively acute than in the theatre?

It was useless even in our period for writers to blame managers, actors, the vulgar taste, and the disturbing circumstances of Victorian drama, — and they were many and deplorable, — for all these were unchangeable so far as the immediate future was concerned. It was still more useless, and unfair also, to single out the popular taste for a chief part of the blame. Had writers, even in those days, put before the public, under slightly more favorable stage conditions, a really vital and meritorious drama, there is little doubt that it would have been understood and appreciated. Browning, although he blamed his producers for the failure of his plays, never, so far as I know, condemned the popular taste.[1]

To do the public justice, one must admit that hardly one of the plays written for the stage by men of genius in those days deserved a much wider popularity than it enjoyed. What the British public has consistently shunned at all times are the abortive attempts to write for the stage on the part of poets, essayists, critics, preachers, and novelists, who, with little or no knowledge of the stage, and less of the technique of the written drama, have made the attempt to catch the public mind through its favorite art. They may have had something worth saying to that public, or they may simply have hoped to add to a limited fame the wider renown of a dramatic author. In most such cases failure is inevitable, even granting a marked dramatic ability. The two chief requisites of stage success have been wanting — first, knowledge, intimate and complete, of the living stage; and second, a still more intimate and complete understanding of the hearts and minds of the audience to which the appeal is to be made. It is, therefore, unfair to blame the English public if in the nineteenth century its greatest writers have composed bad plays. If the blame is to be fairly placed, it should fall upon those writers who have sought to make a dramatic appeal, and yet considered themselves above the inevitable task of mastering the contemporary stagecraft. They may not be blamable for deserting the stage because of a preference for other work. It is not fair, however, to suppose on their behalf that they were decidedly above the task they shunned and despised. Having undertaken the most difficult of literary techniques, they have given

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[1] Henry James at a much later date did so rather snobbishly, I think, although his provocation may have been great (see p. 110, n.3). His attitude of superiority to the whole business of play production is typical of that species of literary scorn for the acted drama which prevailed during the nineteenth century. Before the actual performance of his play he wrote that he wanted "to 'chuck' the whole intolerable experiment and return to more elevated and more independent courses. The whole odiousness of the thing," he continued, "lies in the connection between the drama and the theatre. The one is admirable in its interest and difficulty, the other loathsome in its conditions. If the drama could only be theoretically or hypothetically acted, the fascination resident in its all but unconquerable form would be unimpaired, and one would be able to have the exquisite exercise without the horrid sacrifice."

Letters of Henry James, i, 211.) After the failure of his play *Guy Domville*, given at the St. James's theatre in 1895, he attributed his ill success, not to his lack of technique, which, he said, "for the comparatively poor and meagre, the piteously simplified, purposes of the English stage, I have made . . . absolutely my own," but rather to his failure to realize, "as only a very limited and simple-minded writer can," the attitude of the theatre-goers, whom he described as "usual theatrical people, who don't want plays . . . of different *kinds*, like books and stories, but only of one kind, which their stiff, rudimentary, clumsily-working vision recognises as the kind they 've had before." (*Ibid.*, i, 229.)

themselves the least possible schooling for its mastery. The public surely ought not to be blamed if their work did not succeed.

Whether for good or bad, the characteristics of English audiences that we have thus far reviewed tyrannized over the London stage in the early nineteenth century more effectually, perhaps, than in any other period. Ready to honor the showman and the loftiest genius, they chose, in the absence of genius, to bestow their favor upon the showman. Perhaps even this despised drudge, like the trade-guild scribbler of old, occasionally felt the inspiring warmth of a guiding genius within him. Perhaps, too, the public, in making its choice, and refusing to be amused by misguided poets, was more discerning than has been supposed. Perhaps they, too, had visions of better things that even the poets had not conceived.

The dissatisfaction was not by any means one-sided. If writers complained of their public, the public returned the abuse. Indeed, the keynote of the times was discontent — general, constant, and indefinite. When one sets seriously about the discovery of causes for the widespread dissatisfaction, one is lost in a maze of bewildering detail. Never before or since, perhaps, have so many forces conspired for the extinction of an art, and never, certainly, has such a conspiracy met with more apparent success. There was, notwithstanding, deep underneath this broil of uncertainty, a yearning for something that neither actor nor playwright clearly understood. While the British public patronized the old schools of writing and acting, and even revered them as models of art, audiences were inwardly, and even unconsciously, tiring of them. A point of satiety was soon to be reached, if not for Shakespeare, at least for the whole dramatic fabric termed Shakespearean. In the Shakespeare "religion" the public still believed, and believed most ardently, but it betrayed increasingly the numbing and devitalizing spirit of a new scepticism. It felt the old standards to be lifeless long before it dared to declare them such in a new creed.

There is in the public mind, as Emerson understood, very little ability to imagine and to create for itself; but there is an almost infinite appreciation of a new and vital creation, and hence a constant yearning for what it may not even conceive. This yearning for something new in the drama was never, I believe, stronger than during the years of our study. Never did the British public more surely expect to witness a stage miracle than in the early years of Victoria's reign. The vagueness of its expectations, however, left both the public itself, and the dramatic fraternity that appealed to that public, in the utmost doubt as to the nature of the coming art. Look in what direction the searchers would, there seemed no hope in the old; and in what was strictly new, like gentlemanly melodrama and burlesque, there was nothing clearly prophetic of a new art. With the atmosphere fairly charged with the sense of a coming change, there was yet no clear-minded or loud-spoken prophet. The public failed as completely to understand its own desires, as did the showmen who attempted to satisfy them. Never did a merchant more completely misunderstand a patron, and never did a patron more bewilder and exasperate a merchant, than in the dramatic commerce of these unlucky years.

Are we yet in a position to define more clearly this longing, or to say with certainty what would satisfy it? Perhaps not. Nevertheless, changes quite specific and clearly the result of this longing have in the last half-century come about on the English stage. Without claiming for them in any sense a great or lasting glory, we may still regard them of much value, and certainly, of great interest, when viewed in the perspective of a half-century. The specially interesting aspect of these changes is the part the public played in picking out, by its "vulgar" predilections, the very elements of which the newer forms were compounded.

The impression has gained ground in the study of the nineteenth-century English drama that its realism sprang, like Minerva, in all its arms, from the Robertsonian movement. Those who have recognized faint beginnings of realism before that time have regarded these as merely disconnected phenomena, remarkable in their way, yet insignificant so far as the general trend of dramatic art was concerned. I believe that this attitude of mind toward the pre-Robertsonian stage does not fairly represent the work done, and that it makes impossible a study of the influences — and these were of no mean significance — which were affecting both the written and the spoken drama.

The statement concerning the written drama most frequently used to explain an absence of genuine English plays, is that French drama came like an invasion from across the Channel, and drove the English from the stage. This belief was frequent among critics of the early century, and it is still the most obvious explanation of what took place. French dramatists were cleverer, French plays were cheap and easily available in the absence of international copyrights, and for these French plays the English, especially the aristocracy, had a predilection due to their traditional admiration for what is foreign in art. Since for some reason — not very clear in anyone's mind — the English drama at this time was almost defunct, French art naturally took its place, as the cheapest and most convenient substitute.

Let us grant this commercial probability as a broad statement of what actually happened. There is yet to be considered the part which English audiences played in the transaction. The truth was, I believe, that in the melodrama, the well-knit farces, the refined romances of the Dumas type, the vaudevilles, the fanciful burlesques and revues, which poured in from France, the English audiences found something for which they were looking, and which those who wrote the "typical English pieces" had not, as yet, learned to give them. Critics abused these French adaptations because they were "light," "thin," "flippant," "trashy," and, worst of all, "un-English." English audiences, however, spurned the criticisms and enjoyed the French "novelties," while the pseudo-Elizabethan versifiers and the writers of the Sheridan-Reynolds-O'Keefe-Colman types of comedy, poured out their hearts in abuse of popular taste, stage conditions, managers, actors, and even admitted their own incompetence. Viewed through their eyes, the case of the drama was indeed desperate; viewed in the light of what we now know, the plight was natural enough. Several decades had to pass before writers could adjust their minds to the new demand.

What, then, was there in the drama from France which so persistently appealed to the English audience? That it was clever, is the statement usually made to explain its popularity. If cleverness, however, had been the only attribute of this novelty, the difference in national point of view would probably have offset its attractiveness. The facts, now generally admitted, that it took deep root; that it was not only popular, but capable of imitation in English; that it was so imitated, and that out of the imitations grew a new comedy largely English in spirit, lead us to the really significant point of the discussion, namely, that the popular taste, after all, proved as consistent and admirable a guide as did the criticism that abused this taste, and the aspirations of dramatists that spurned it. In the French drama was found a new *vivida vis* — the trend toward realism. The public had become frankly tired of the ineffectual imitations of the Elizabethan stage; and even later, when these, under Knowles and Bulwer, were decked out with touches of the new

French romanticism, it manifested but a mild admiration for them. The finer products, too, of the French poetic drama as well as the German, had no charm for English audiences, whether these works were conceived in the classic mood or the newer romantic style of Hugo. Such plays were bound in the English mind to suffer when compared with Shakespeare's. There was, however, something entirely new to the public in the despised minor forms of contemporary French art. Even in the melodrama there was a new spirit which made a fresh and unmistakable appeal, and that spirit, strange as it may seem now, was the first suggestion the public received of what we to-day call realism.

But, it will be asked, was there not more realism in Shakespeare and in the contemporary comedy of manners than in this, to us, wholly unnatural type of art, the early melodrama? In reality, yes, but virtually, no; for the realism of Shakespeare was to a Victorian audience remote and poetical, and there was no strictly contemporary comedy. What is more, when the older types appeared on the contemporary stage, they were, as we shall see later, played in a spirit as remote from realism as acting can ever very well be, and appeared to the delight of audiences as fanciful as the tinsel crowns, the plumes, and the green-baize carpet, that created the fiction of their stage.

In the art from France the English sensed a new mood. To see people look, and to hear them talk, even remotely like their fellows, was to an Englishman a new, and, therefore, a pleasurable experience. It is true that the cleverness and the sensation of the new forms made the first appeal: but the change in technique was thoroughly enjoyed by the audiences and made a whole-hearted admiration for the English methods no longer possible. It was not unlike the effect of the plays of Ibsen upon Anglo-Saxon audiences of the eighteen-nineties. While not winning unmixed approbation, they made impossible a continuance of the old manner of play-writing and play-acting.

In the French dramaturgy there was an economy of dialogue, a nice articulation of plot, in short, a touch of that vitality for which the English audiences yearned, and which the English playwrights knew how to give only by bombast in tragedy and forced-wit battles or horse-play in comedy strung on a shambling plot.

I am perfectly aware, when I contend that the English audience chose by preference a more realistic art than their own, that they were not moved by an innate love of theatrical realism, and that, perhaps, is the reason why the realistic school of art, once established on the English stage, has not made the rapid strides that were hoped for it. The realism, too, of the French art reflected on the English stage was very far from the present-day conception of stage realism. It was, however, a vast step in advance of the contemporary English artificiality, and, as such, it was recognized and enjoyed by English audiences. Nor was this approval a matter of sudden and universal accord. It was in itself a thing of growth, beginning among the humblest patrons of the drama, and extending gradually until it had possessed not only the fashionable but the critical as well. Sensation and cleverness may have explained much of this vogue, but by no means suffice to explain the phenomena attending it. The chief result of the tendency, as we shall establish, I think, beyond doubt, was the Robertsonian comedy, and this, while it had cleverness, was not clever wholly in the French sense, and sensation it lacked almost altogether.

Certain it is, that with the coming of Fechter in 1860, the French art triumphed, not as a new one, but as an old and formerly despised one, now risen to a dignity only vaguely anticipated in the achievements of Charles Kean. The triumph was not by any means the single-handed work of Fechter, as is sometimes assumed, but was, as I shall, I believe, also satisfactorily establish, the result of a long and slow growth of sixty years, which made the work of Fechter possible. In this growth the significant fact for us to note at present is the part played by the English public in its spontaneous fondness for the elements of vitality in the French art. It was only after this complete triumph with the English public, marked on its artistic side by Robertson, and on its clever and sensational side by Boucicault, that Chatterton in 1869 pronounced his fatal dictum, which has wrongly been applied to the entire period, that "Shakespeare spells ruin and Byron bankruptcy."[1]

My object in writing this discussion is not by any means to plead for realism as the highest form of stage art, or to extol it as a *non plus ultra* of drama. Possibly it has already spent itself as a creative force. Certainly no art for the stage will come in the near future in England or elsewhere, which does not to some extent reflect its influence. At present I wish merely to fix our attention, before entering upon the development of the forms of stagecraft, upon the certainty that realism in the drama was the great fact of the age, and that the British audiences were the first part of the English dramatic mirror to catch and reflect the new fact. The slow but steady drift toward realism which chiefly determines our subsequent study, took the form of an uncertain and even unconscious demand on the part of the public, met by a still more faltering and confused output on the part of the theatre, the more serious workers for which did not, until the very end, know clearly what they were about. Thus to return once more to Filon's assertion, we are confronted with one of the most complex literary studies and one of the most pregnant of lessons. Thus the curtain of the early

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[1] In a letter by Manager Chatterton of Drury Lane to the *Times*, reprinted in the *Theat. Jour.* for Aug. 25, 1869.

Victorian theatre rose, indeed, on the most strangely suggestive of all spectacles.

Let us make sure that we understand each other in the use of the familiar slogans of literary reformers — realism and the return to nature. In no sense shall we regard them as absolute concepts. We shall not, on the one hand, consider stage realism as meaning at all what the literary realism meant to the readers of Fielding and later to the readers of Thackeray and Dickens; or, on the other hand, what it means to the intellectuals inspired by Ibsen. On the stage of the early century it was a thing quite different, individual, and in constant process of development — a development, moreover, that was exceedingly slow. If Dickens had to make realism palatable to his readers by burlesque and Thackeray by satire and sentiment, the writers for the stage had still more certainly to deck it out in order to catch the less discriminating ear of the listening public. Therefore its progress was much slower and less distinct, and, as we have seen, was still further involved by the superadded French influence. Besides, the progress of realism in acting was much faster than its progress in the written drama, for which reason, those who study the early-nineteenth-century drama merely in its written relics, find in them hardly any realism at all. The public, however, is much nearer to the spoken drama than to the written, and the interplay of realistic forces had proceeded, as we shall see, to great lengths on the stage before they were more than slightly apparent in the written drama. In dealing, therefore, with stage realism, we are considering a most complicated subject without clear limits, and with far more than a single means of expression. We shall use it, then, not to denote a definite state of vivid actuality or photographic fidelity, for this, indeed, realism never has meant and probably never will mean: but we shall employ it rather to signify a tendency and a course of development, toward which practically all the forces of the stage in our period contributed, and which, in the last analysis, was determined as much by the popular taste as by any other single influence. If it will help in clarity, let us set Colman's *John Bull* as acted in 1803 for a starting-point in this dramatic progress, and Robertson's *Caste*, produced in 1867 and acted by the Bancrofts, Hare, and the Prince of Wales troupe, as the state in which we leave dramatic realism. Correspondingly we shall watch the education of the public taste reacting upon its stage, from the standards that welcomed *John Bull* as a master-work and would undoubtedly have damned Robertson's *Caste*, to the standards that saw in *Caste* the greatest comedy of the century, but would have found *John Bull* dull and tedious. To be concrete, this is our immediate problem: to watch the progress of realism from the production of *John Bull* to that of *Caste*. As I have already intimated, however, we shall watch that progress, not, as is usual, through the closet study of plays, but through the eyes of the British public at the theatres. And for that reason, I have been at some pains in this chapter to make clear the British point of view as nearly as I can understand it.

One fact about the public of the early century we must not forget in making up its record for a fair judgment. It honored and enjoyed the plays of Shakespeare. It witnessed them in the grand or "classic" style of Kemble, the sentimental style of O'Neill, the romantic style of Kean, the "metaphysical" style of Macready, and the realistic or, rather, melodramatic style of Fechter. Throughout these manifold transformations of the great plays, the public continued to find in them lasting satisfaction. Had they neglected Shakespeare as they did those who sought to imitate him, their case would have been far more serious. The simple fact is that they went rather to the other extreme of adoration, and allowed their Shakespeare worship to dim their vision when it looked about for a contemporary art. It has been said that they tolerated Shakespeare merely because of the pageantry with which his plays were decked out, or merely because, now and then, a great actor made a sensation by sheer force. Such circumstances no doubt played a part in the popular favor, and a large part, too: but it is wholly unfair to suppose that sixty years of devotion to fifteen or more Shakespeare plays, some of which were given almost nightly at the theatres, could possibly be explained by spectacle, costumes, or the spell of an occasional great actor. In spite of many other discouraging facts about the stage of this period, there was in the plays of Shakespeare great drama worthily acted, and, what is more, truly enjoyed by the despised and vulgar audiences dubbed early-Victorian. When we consider the prodigious list of such revivals associated with the names of Kemble, Siddons, O'Neill, Edmund Kean, Macready, Phelps, Cushman, Charles Kean, Fechter, Irving, and Booth, not to mention scores of lesser celebrities, we can hardly doubt the willingness of the British public to listen to great drama if worthily presented. Let it not be supposed, either, except in the cases of Kemble, Macready, and Charles Kean, that the bard's plays were set forth with a prodigality of scenery and costumes sufficient to draw crowds to the theatres for the settings only. But Shakespeare entering upon a third century of fame could hardly be supposed indefinitely to satisfy the popular taste. The wonder was that audiences for so long a time and so enthusiastically enjoyed Shakespeare's art, which was created for an age wholly unlike their own.

The tentacles of the great popular octopus, feeling thus blindly for a new art, fixed gradually but firmly upon the ingredients out of which the newer comedy was to be built: in melodrama they found quick and concentrated action, also sentiment and domestic passion, happy endings, and a moral elevation ever dear to English audiences;

and in the lighter forms of comic art from France, they satisfied their longing for the play of wit, individual characters, naturalistic dialogue, a clear technique, and a wholly new method of acting to suit.

Out of these ingredients the workmen Robertson and Boucicault, who at the end of our period filled the dramatic horizon, compounded what has come to be considered the "modern English comedy." The fundamental difference between them, as Boucicault himself pointed out, was scenic: Robertson choosing for his work "lodgings or drawing-rooms," and Boucicault "a more romantic scope."[1] It must not be thought, either, that French influence was alone responsible for the change. The treatment given to the French art in the English theatre was a phenomenon in itself, and while to some extent a reflection of the French spirit, it was to an even greater extent English-bred and attuned to English tastes. It is the chief burden of our work in the following chapters to show that this contribution from the new methods, developed in stagecraft apart from the spoken drama, was the chief means of appeal to English audiences, and hence the principal contribution made to the Robertsonian drama. They for a time gave their hearing to Knowles and Bulwer, not so much because they were pseudo-Elizabethans as because they were domestic and intimate, and as acted they became even more so than they appear in print. Jerrold, who prided himself on being purely original, appealed to the public not through his imitations of the old comedy, however modernized, but through the frankly contemporary *Rent Day* and *Black-eyed Susan*, which could be acted in the new manner that had come in with the "illegitimate" drama. A long period of years was still necessary to awaken English dramatists to all the new demands made upon them by their public. When at last Boucicault and Robertson, after apprenticeships and vague experimentation, found "what the public wanted," it was merely by gathering up the stray threads indicated by popular favor during a half-century and presenting them in a newly woven fabric. What they had thus picked up and embodied was not, I believe, primarily the literary influences of France, however great these admittedly were, but the purely English attributes of jollity, homeliness, and eccentric humor which had come to them through no literary influences whatsoever, but through the new school of English acting, the development of which was the important fact with which we have to deal, and in the creation of which the British public was the chief in command

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[1] Letter to Mrs. Bancroft. See *The Bancrofts*, p. 195.

Chapter VI

THEATRICAL MANAGEMENT: CAUSES OF FAILURE

WITH the attitude of the English audience in mind, as protagonist in the drama enacted without and around the drama on the stage, we must next consider its foil, namely, the much-abused theatre-manager. If the box-office returns had been better, the manager insisted, he would have set before the public a Utopian drama. Let us see what grounds there were for his perennial excuse.

As we have already had occasion to remark, failure in dramatic management was all but universal before 1860. With the possible exception of the Haymarket, no theatre was continuously prosperous through this period. If here and there a successful run or a fruitful period of years gave heart to the lessee of a theatre, a nemesis of failure was awaiting him. In the face of this all-embracing business depression of the drama, it is hardly fair, as many contemporaries did, to blame chiefly the managers for the reverses of "legitimate" drama.

It is true that few of these unfortunates showed any serious interest in the artistic welfare of the stage. Fewer still penetrated below the obvious popular demands for sensation, spectacle, music, and animals. Besides the great actor-managers like Kemble and Macready, Vestris and Mathews, Buckstone and Webster, Charles Kean, and the Bancrofts, hardly any of the producers of plays betrayed the slightest creative activity.

Why, then, were the receipts so small and the Utopian drama financially impossible? Each decade of our century had its own characteristic explanation. The first emphasized the vastness of the new theatres; the second, while also blaming the size of the theatres, found the cause of failure in the paucity of dramatic authorship and indifferent management; the third blamed the star system and spectacle; the fourth centred its condemnation upon the monopoly and manager Bunn; the fifth saw the true explanation in the presence of French companies and the foreign opera; and the sixth blamed trash and sensation. Whatever explanation satisfied a given generation, the general calamity of managements continued unabated until the last decade of our period, and then only those which presented the newer art succeeded financially.

The success of the drama, then, considered merely in its commercial aspects is our present engaging topic. This book, as a whole, attempts to answer the larger question, why drama as an art failed to take its place worthily among the other forms of Victorian literature. The financial problem is not the least of the antagonistic influences.

The following is the orthodox list of causes advanced by those who treat the subject of dramatic failure in the nineteenth century:

1. Size of the monopoly theatres.
2. The monopoly itself, which forced the use of the large theatres and suppressed the more favorable minors.
3. The preference of the masses for reading.
4. The centralization of the monopoly theatres, making them inaccessible to the greater mass of the population lying beyond Westminster.
5. The competition of the minors with their cheaper "illegitimate" drama.
6. Opposition of the clergy.
7. The indifference of the crown.
8. The indifference of the aristocracy.
9. The late dinner hour among the better classes.
10. Improvement in the comforts of home and the growth of clubs.

11. Hard times among the middle and lower classes.
12. Lack of vitality in the drama, generally attributed to its failure to reflect the life and thought of the times.

These were the difficulties that beset the manager from without. To this list must be added the following, which directly influenced his accounts:

1. Large companies required by the triple bill.
2. High salaries to stars.
3. Huge cost of production, due to the rage for spectacles.
4. Absence of endowments and governmental assistance.
5. Losses through law suits, due to litigation over monopoly rights.

The first twelve of these formidable influences tended to keep the people from the theatres: the last five merely added to the managers' otherwise intolerable burdens. Nor were these wholly independent enemies that could be met and overcome separately. On the contrary, they conspired together, and each lent force to the other. The vast cost of spectacles, for instance, was not only a weight upon the management, but also an expense that produced ambiguous results; for while it no doubt attracted more to the pit and galleries, it gradually created a disposition among the better classes to avoid the theatres. The monopoly, too, was two-edged. While it was designed to protect the managers of the legitimate drama, it forced them to produce plays under such unfavorable conditions as to make profit impossible. The sufficient proof that the monopoly managers' financial conditions were ruinous was the contrasting success enjoyed by those who managed the privileged Haymarket, which, for the most part, catered to the same public and staged the same type of performance. Even when its season had been extended to include most of the year, Webster and Buckstone, for a period of thirty years, not only kept the theatre from failure, but appear to have made it prosperous. At this theatre operatic companies and spectacles were fortunately unnecessary.

A somewhat closer inspection of these causes of financial ruin is necessary, because of the information to be derived concerning the state of the drama in general. The effect of the large theatres, we have already considered at length in previous chapters. A writer in the *Quarterly Review* declared: "[The theatres] have far outgrown the faculties both of actors and spectators; where no one can be heard without an exertion of voice almost fatal to its melody and variety of intonation; and where no one can hear without an overstrained attention."[1]

This fact, which was obvious enough to some critics, did not seem universally to be admitted.[2] There was, indeed, a common belief that the people really preferred to hear the legitimate drama in the great edifices devoted to it legally. Macready, for instance, speaking before the committee of parliament in 1832, declared that, although he personally preferred the smaller theatres, the public seemed to think otherwise. He cited as evidence the retirement of Mrs. Siddons to the Haymarket after the burning of Covent Garden in 1809, whereupon her audiences, instead of filling the little house, fell off appreciably.

In 1833 this experiment was again repeated, with similar results. In that year, for a short time, the Covent Garden company retired to the little Olympic Theatre, but failed even there to attract full houses. The *Observer* further commented upon the previous Siddons experience, and noted besides that when she and her company appeared at the Italian Opera House, which was bigger than either of the majors, it was nightly crowded.[3]

What the public happened to think about the size of houses, however, does not affect the question of its influence upon the drama. What the public is accustomed to, not infrequently seems best to that public, facts to the contrary notwithstanding; and it had become a part of the dramatic religion that legitimate drama should be played in vast theatres. It was quite characteristic of the public mind to reason, as apparently it did long after 1830, that the grandeur of tragedy was enhanced by the grandeur of the houses in which it was performed, and this conclusion would by no means invalidate the other quite as probable conclusion, that the drama had become less attractive to the same public because of the size of the houses. Literary drama, moreover, was known by the public at its best only at the monopoly houses; for it is probable that companies attuned to the grand style seemed out of place in the little Haymarket Theatre. To the small theatres, too, was still attached the stigma of "illegitimacy."

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[1] *Quarterly Review*, vol. xlvi (1831), "History of the English Drama."

[2] J. F.-Robertson likes D. L. See p. 59, n. 3.

[3] May 2, 1833, no. 3549.

The public shared the feeling of most of the actors, voiced for them by Charles Lamb in his prologue to Coleridge's *Remorse*. He makes the speaker assert:

> We players . . .
> . . . think a house can never be too large:
> Griev'd when a rant that 's worth a nation's ear,
> Shakes some prescribed Lyceum's petty sphere.
> And pleased to mark the grin from space to space
> Spread epidemic o'er a town's broad face.

Whatever the cause, the public did not generously patronize any theatre open to the legitimate drama except the Haymarket; and as this was the only theatre opened in summer, its success was assured. A writer in Leigh Hunt's *Tatler* complained: "The houses from their extent are never on an average more than one third occupied." [1] As Coleridge very well put it, "Our theatres are fit for nothing — they are too large for acting and too small for a bull-fight." [2]

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[1] *Tatler*, April 11, 1832.

[2] *Theat. Obs.*, Nov. 15, 1828.

More experience in the early century would probably have convinced the public, as it did later, of their mistake in supposing the great theatres more befitting the literary drama. The following comment upon Kean's appearance at the Lyceum (the English Opera House) in 1828, while Covent Garden was closed, is to the point:

> To see Kean at this house, is something like looking at a beautiful object through a microscope, all the brilliancy of which is enhanced, and minuter beauties invisible to the naked eye, are developed with a perfection that astonishes you; so it is with the acting of Kean at this theatre. The public have found it out and are flocking here in crowds to witness his performances.[1]

If more proof were needed, it is to be found in the quickness with which the legitimate drama abandoned the great houses after the freeing of the theatres, resorting to the smaller and far more comfortable houses like the Princess's and Sadler's Wells.

Next in importance, perhaps, of the causes assigned for the falling off of attendance at the theatres was the spread of reading among the masses, making it possible for them to entertain themselves more comfortably and cheaply, if not more pleasurably, at home than at the theatres. This was not an argument of recent invention, but was generally and persistently advanced at the time. In the *Quarterly Review* a serious article on the stage appearing in 1831 gave very clearly the contemporary belief as to the effect of reading upon the drama:

> The immense increase in the reading public [declared the writer] has reduced the part of the community which has the power to enjoy, and the inclination to support the drama, to comparative insignificance. The novelist has supplanted the dramatist in public interest. Where the theatre has one visitor, the circulating library has a hundred subscribers. Those who

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, Nov. 15, 1828.

in other ages would have looked for fame on the stage, have found it in the novel.[1]

This pronouncement states the familiar argument squarely and strongly; it has the further value of a contemporary opinion. I must confess, however, to no small amount of scepticism as to the weight of this argument. On its face it bears the stamp of the *post hoc* fallacy. Because a falling off in dramatic interest succeeded the increase in the reading public, it is by no means safe to assume that dramatic attendance was reduced "to comparative insignificance" because of this new condition. To consider its validity more closely, we find that it assumes two rather questionable facts. The first, that a man intelligent enough to read a novel, let us say, by Sir Walter Scott, would be too sophisticated to enjoy the stage representation of it. The vast number of dramatized novels in our day and even, we may add, in Scott's lifetime[2]—his own novels included — seem fairly good evidence against this premise. Experience, I believe,—and one can now speak from a wider one than could the early writer in the *Quarterly Review*,—by no means confirms his assumption that the ability to read destroys "the power to enjoy and the inclination to support the drama." The other assumption, less radical, but nevertheless untenable in the view of a broader experience, is that one who reads will naturally enjoy reading more than the art of the stage. This premise takes for granted, I believe, far more imagination on the part of the reading public than it possesses. If we concede that there are those — yourself who are reading this page, for instance — who "prefer reading a Shakespeare play to seeing it on the stage" (to select a favorite "bromide"), it is nevertheless unsafe to conclude that those gifted with less imagination than you will find the same satisfaction from the inanimate pages of a book as from an action visualized before them by the double genius of playwright and actor. It is a remarkable coincidence, to say the least, that as the reading public increased, the attendance at the playhouses seemed to increase even more noticeably. If drama failed financially in 1830 because of the reading public, we should expect to find it hardly more than a memory in 1900. Whatever we may say of the quality of present-day drama, it cannot be called financially a failure. It is more nearly the truth to call it our best-paid art.

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[1] *Quart. Rev.*, vol. xlvi (1831), "History of the English Drama," etc.

[2] Professor H. E. Joyce has listed 27 dramatizations of Scott's novels performed before 1832. There were probably many more.

Viewed, then, in its general aspects, the argument based on the reading public has been greatly overvalued. If confined merely to our period, especially to the years of the monopoly, the contention had, perhaps, more force than it has had since. The exaggerated art of the stage inherited from the latter part of the eighteenth century had little to attract an appreciative reader of the English novelists, either romantic or realistic. It was not unnatural, then, for contemporary observers to suppose that, because the reading public did not like the monopoly drama, it therefore turned its back upon all drama. In this form the argument becomes confused with the obvious fact that the decadent dramatic artificiality of the beginning of the century was repellent to most people of taste and judgment, and its attending vulgarities of melodrama and burlesque disgusted them altogether.

The one really vital influence of the reading public upon the drama was an indirect one. It furnished lucrative employment of a reliable sort to authors who in former days would have turned naturally to the uncertain chances of the stage, and more especially was this true because the stage under monopoly conditions was a wholly unattractive field for any man who valued his literary good name. At the beginning of their careers, I believe, both Dickens and Browning would have chosen to produce ten good acting plays each, in preference to the publication of the rest of their voluminous achievement. The road to such success, while possible, was, as both Dickens and Browning learned, much too forbidding.

The extension of reading, then, changed appreciably the character of audiences, and gave literary men a means of escape from the drudgery of the practical stage; but that it was a prime and moving cause either of the absence of drama, or of the small financial support of the stage, I am not prepared to admit.

The next seven causes enumerated need not detain us. We have already sufficiently dealt with the indifference of the aristocracy and the crown. The influence of the late dinner hour and the comforts of home is ever the same, and tells even more heavily to-day against the drama than in the far less fortunate period we are discussing. The centralization of the theatres and the difficulty of conveyance from remote parts of the city no doubt had an important effect upon theatre attendance. These were not the days of tubes, taxis, and motor busses. The opposition of the clergy, too, need not concern us deeply. It has been a constant attendant of the drama from the time the pope's bull and the jealous clergy drove the miracle plays from their proper homes in the cathedrals. As a result of the non-conformist activity of Wesley, the great middle class in our period was supposed to have been turned against the vices of the theatre more, perhaps, than at any other time in the history of the English stage. This influence is difficult to estimate. If it were as great as supposed, it is at least a strange coincidence that neither before nor since has the activity of the censor been so great, and never has there been a more deferential moral tone in the dramatic art of England. No doubt the preachers inveighed more directly against the presence of prostitutes than against the seductiveness of dramatic action. Such seems to have been the attitude, at least, of the Bishop of London. Here, it must be admitted, was a very real grievance, but financially it was supposed by managers—to their shame be it said—to justify itself.

Two other important causes remain: hard times and the lack of vitality in the drama. The first is the more tangible and, therefore, more inviting. As I intimated in the chapter on "London Life and the Stage" there is an important point to be made of the economic life of the city in its bearing upon the financial state of the drama. I do not feel competent to enter upon so complicated a subject, and one which lies outside of my own; furthermore, I am afraid it would make too long a chapter. The wretchedness of the lower classes, which led to the reform movement, is too well known to need any explanation from me. This movement coincided almost exactly with the critical stage of the fight for a free drama. The enormous increase in the national debt following the Napoleonic wars — an increase, it is estimated, of six hundred millions over and above the figure of two hundred and fifty millions against the exchequer in 1793 — and the Corn Law and Luddite agitations were sufficient indication of the dismal presence of hard times. It is significant that in 1832, the year of the Reform Bill, the financial state of the drama was at its very worst: even the minors had to reduce their already lowered prices; and at the great theatres the average yearly receipts from 1815 to 1832 were only £47,000 or £38,000 less than for the five years preceding 1815.[1]

In 1818, three years after the Napoleonic wars, we read of the attempt of the Drury Lane committee to discover the cause for the rapid decline in their receipts. A table presented by a subcommittee showed the following annual diminution in the income of the theatre:

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[1] These figures are quoted by Dr. McNeill in an unprinted thesis in the Harvard Library, and they are based on the *Edinburgh Review*, lviii, 297.

1812–13....	£80,000	1815–16....	£61,400
1813–14....	£71,200	1816–17....	£43,900
1814–15....	£70,600	1817–18....	£43,000

As a result of this falling off in receipts, the theatre found itself confronted with a tradesman's debt of £32,000, and other liabilities amounting in all to £90,000. A recommendation was made by the subcommittee to reduce the price of admission; but, if this project was adopted, it was certainly not long continued as a practice.

For this calamity, there was more than the war to blame. The committee made no mention of it as a cause for failure. There is no reason, however, to suppose that the attractions at the theatre were any less alluring after 1814, which marked the appearance of Kean, than they had been during the previous decade, when the attendance had been fairly good, and the management under Sheridan notably bad. It is probable, then, that a period of war depression was very largely responsible for this marked decline in theatrical fortunes, although the managing committee attributed all the blame to the competition with the minors, which they had "no power to suppress." [1]

From 1832 until 1835 the condition of the great theatres was so bad that they were finally united under the manager Bunn as a measure of economy. He was to pay a rental of £6000 for each house annually, instead of the £8000 he himself had previously paid, which in turn was £2000 less than had been exacted of Elliston who managed Drury Lane from 1819 to 1827.[2] As a further proof of the low estate to which the drama had fallen financially, Bunn was obliged to reduce the price of the pit from the standard three shillings and sixpence, established by the O. P. riots, to the two and six which, with some exceptions, has been the pit price to the present day. In Bunn's time, we must recall, there were no ten-shilling seats in the orchestra. Although the change was hailed by the populace with joy, as "the most important event for many a long year,"[1] it made no appreciable difference in the receipts of the theatres. It brought more people into the theatres, and thus created the appearance of greater prosperity, — but even this appearance was not as imposing as had been expected.

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[1] For a complete account of these proceedings see *Theat. Inquis.*, xiii, 363 (Nov., 1818).

[2] *Theat. Obs.*, no. 4238, July 20, 1835.

Three decades later, in the day of free theatres, the account stood very differently, indicating, I believe, not only the greater attractiveness of the small houses, but also an improved economic condition of the city. The following table of the prices of admission at various times during our period may be taken as a reliable barometer of theatrical finance:

	Boxes	*Pit*
1792	6*s*	3*s* 6*a*
1809	7*s*	4*s*
1809 (O. P.)	6*s*	3*s* 6*d*
1830	7*s*	3*s* 6*d*
1835	5*s*	2*s* 6*d*
1839 (Macready)	5*s*	2*s* 6*d*
1852 (Smith)	4*s*[2]	2*s*
	Stalls[3]	
1865	6*s*	2*s* 6*d*
Later	7*s*	2*s* 6*d*
1874	10*s*	2*s* 6*d*

From this list it will be seen that after 1835 the theatres were obliged to yield to hard times, lower their prices, and wait for the happy day which came with the Robertsonian movement, before they could again demand an adequate price for theatrical entertainment. Monopoly, of course, and the other factors mentioned in this chapter, played a part also. More powerful than all of these was the ruinous influence upon drama of the hard times after 1815, from which the country as a whole was slow in recovering.

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, no. 4318, Oct. 20, 1835.

[2] These figures were for Drury Lane in its most decadent condition. I have no record of the prices at the Princess's and the Lyceum, which at this time were probably higher.

[3] The Bancrofts rapidly increased the price of the stalls, which in the minor theatres replaced the boxes in popular favor.

The two ideal conditions for business prosperity in the drama, as in all commerce, are an ample supply of money in the pockets of patrons, and an equally bountiful supply in the dealer's possession of the kind of thing his patrons want to buy. As we have just seen, the patrons were at this time none too liberal in expenditure, and at the same time, the theatres where the legitimate drama was played seemed to be wretchedly provided with the kind of drama people cared to pay generously to see. The point invariably made against the dramatic art was that it lacked vitality, or, to put the cause of this lack first, the age itself was "undramatic." Hazlitt, for instance, wrote: "The age we live in is critical, didactic, paradoxical, romantic, but it is not dramatic. This, if any, is its weak side." [1] Eleven years later the writer for the *Quarterly Review* whom we have already quoted [2] particularized as follows:

> The present is an undramatic age—nor is this the case only in England. Even in Paris now-a-days, there is rarely more than one theatre open, and that of moderate dimensions, for the genuine drama of Racine and Molière; nor is that one, since the exit of Talma, well attended. Political excitement will indeed draw crowds to new tragedies like Jouy's *Sylla*, and great sensations excited by dramatic revolutionists like Hugo; but in general the French capital is as indifferent to the *affiches* of the Théâtre Français as our own, beyond a certain circle, to those of Covent Garden.

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[1] *London Magazine*, April, 1820. Collected Works (London, 1903), viii, 415.

[2] Vol. xlvi (1831), "History of English Dramatic Poetry."

It is not at first sight easy to comprehend all that was meant by this characterization. Such statements were generally both sweeping and vague. Nevertheless they represent a very real influence that told against the stage in the early century. Regarded as a cause, the influence implied was not simple and reducible to a definite formula. It was, indeed, more a resultant than a creative force. It was itself a condition into the creation of which there entered many of the characteristics of the age. The basic fact was that the age lacked fitting material for the drama. Its corollary was that the age also lacked the ability to enjoy or appreciate the drama as a literary form. The inevitable deduction from these assumed facts was that the stage could not find material to replenish the failing stock of plays. The essential vitality in drama, arising from an interplay between contemporary life and the theatre, was impossible, and therefore there was no direct appeal in the theatre to allure the public to the box office.

This, I take it, was the meaning of the vague but general complaint that the nature of the times was antagonistic. It will, therefore, pay us to examine a little more closely the premises upon which this elaborate argument was constructed. In the first place, why did the age lack material befitting the stage?

Those who made this contention represented the age as bereft of poetical character. The great movement of the times — call it popular, democratic, socialistic, utilitarian, as you like — was mercilessly leveling out of the people's lives the pretty manners and romantic extravagances of earlier days. Laborer and lord alike were now confined to a drab series of commonplace sights, actions, and amusements. While the poets of the age, without being bound by actualities, found scope for their fancy in the aspirations of the people for a new liberty, the dramatists had no such escape: if they dealt with life at all, they must give it in its external ugliness; for the stage, as they conceived it, could not deal primarily in terms of spirit. The great and noble actions becoming the age of chivalry were no more; nor were the splendid outward trappings of that typically dramatic epoch any longer to be seen in the London mud, clatter, and brick-framed patches of smoke-dimmed skies. If poets resorted to history and romance for dramatic subjects, they came fatally into competition with the one great and unapproachable dramatist who spoke out of a romance that he himself lived. If, on the other hand, they descended to present-day realities, they must break with a sacred dramatic tradition for the lofty, picturesque, and heroic. In an age when theatrical realism was confined to such effusions as *Tom and Jerry*, to vulgar melodramas, and to tawdry burlesques, no self-respecting dramatist could so belittle himself as to enter into this debasing kind of competition. Thus, we see, an unpoetic age confronted a theatrical generation utterly unskilled in anything but a poetic depiction of life. Even comedy must be dressed and acted in the manners of times gone by. What then was the dramatist to do? He must dream himself out of his own times by a stretch of imagination far too great for the powers of any who, in the early century, ventured upon flights of dramatic fancy.

If the age contributed nothing in subject matter to the stage, the drama, it was naturally assumed, could not exert a normal fascination over the public. The barren dramatic products of these times seem fully to warrant the assumption. But this was not all. The very faculties for the enjoyment of drama had been dulled, it was believed, by the spirit of the times. This contention was based partly upon the assumption that such a disparity as existed between the fictitious romantic life of the stage, and the drab commonplace of everyday life, could serve only to make the drama seem a palpable sham. The stolidity of English character itself contributed to make this influence decisive. To make bad matters worse, it was further contended, that in the great theatre of international politics a drama was in progress that killed what interest a hard-minded populace like the English might possibly take in the mock grandeur of the stage. Was not the Napoleonic career itself a stupendous *coup de théâtre?* Could a popular imagination so preëmpted, so fed upon spectacular realities, turn with satisfaction, or even genuine interest, to the pretended heroics of the theatre? While the lives of the people had lost both poetry and romance, the nation itself was chief hero in a drama that made the stage seem pale in comparison. With a Wellington and a Napoleon before their eyes, even their Kembles and Keans seemed but dim shadows. A later age might look back upon these heroes and idealize them into dramatic realities. Their own age must know them directly and to do this was to raise them immeasurably above the drama. So it appeared that English life afforded no clue to drama: even the one great dramatic event of the age predisposed the public against the drama. While the neurotic magnificence of the Revolution tended to dim the glamour of the theatre, the plainness and fatuity of the people's life emphasized more than ever the unrealities of dramatic art. There was nothing in common between the man in the pit and the grimacing comedian or the ranting tragedian of the stage.

Here was a concatenation of theories which, if highly problematical, were nevertheless expressive of a deep-seated influence of the times. In the light of any stage tradition known to the people or the critics, it was simply impossible for the people and the drama to meet. Here, indeed, was a sorry pass. Our own age, many believe, came upon a solution of the difficulty in a relentless realism, which, in the days of Kemble and Siddons, Munden and Fawcett, and even those of Kean and Macready, was as unthinkable as electric lights or moving pictures. Even in the minor drama, where a kind of realism was permissible, it was half-heartedly practised as a necessary evil and with complete delusion as to its value. Writers resorted to realism as their only refuge, and made use of it, not for its deeper significance, but simply because of its sentimental and sensational values.

Said one of these drudges:

> If we go to the play, we desire not to see the dull old story of this working-day world grumbled over again; but to have our curiosity excited, our sympathy awakened, our eyes and ears feasted with stirring incidents and ravishing sounds. We seek in fiction the pleasant illusion of a brighter world than that to which we are chained by careful toil and selfish sorrow. We desire a momentary escape from matter-of-fact monotony.[1]

This pronouncement, out of the heart of the popular drama of the day, might well serve as a text upon which to build the story of the nineteenth-century English drama. It is fundamental to our study. What the people and the writers thought that they wanted least of all, was the very thing which both were unconsciously working to bring about. The trend toward realism on the stage had already set in, while the writers, expressing perfectly the will of the people, declared their business to be the creation of "the pleasant illusion of a brighter world than that to which we are chained by careful toil and selfish sorrow." How this strange contradiction enacted itself, is the subject for almost all the pages to follow. But here let us once more observe that an age which was essentially realistic met a stage as unrealistic and fictitious as the romance that perished upon the satirical lance-thrusts of *Don Quixote*. The tragedy lay in the fact that, without knowing it, the people were blindly awaiting the very thing which at the time seemed most abhorrent to themselves and to their writers — a genuine theatrical realism in which to see themselves. When this new realism at last came about, they, by a development of their own, had changed their romantic faith, and they no longer looked upon the new art as hostile either to their pride or their happiness. With it, as Justin McCarthy said, was reborn the mirth of the nation.

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[1] Editorial comment prefacing the play of the *Foundling of the Forest*, signed D. G., in Cumberland's "Minor Drama."

If we have not gone too far into the clouds of theory, let us descend once more to the plain commercial fact that, because the theatre had nothing of vital interest for the people, the people, accordingly, stayed away from the theatre. If of all the dramatic ills this was the least definable, it was, nevertheless, the greatest and most significant one. It went to the heart of the dramatic problem. It alone sufficiently accounted for both the poverty of the drama and the poverty of those who undertook to traffic in its values.

Of the twelve reasons enumerated by the critical coroner's juries self-appointed at various times to sit upon the decease of drama, only three appear to me adequately to explain the deplorable state of drama during the first decades of the century, and also the unpopularity of the drama among the masses. These causes were: the monopoly conditions, which limited individual enterprise and restricted literary drama to the large theatres; hard times, which bore with special severity upon those who chiefly patronized the theatres; and, finally, the undramatic character of the age, which in the last analysis meant simply that the theatrical world had not yet acquired the skill to mirror forth in terms of realism a life which was thought to be suggestive of no other treatment.

If the conditions external to the theatres made the manager's business a dull one, the conditions within made it ruinous. The accounts of every manager of the legitimate drama, almost to the end of our period, represented a state of affairs in the theatrical household that would dazzle the boldest dramatic adventurer in our days of Frohmans, Hammersteins, and Reinhardts.

First, there was the vast size of companies. Performers were engaged by the season, regardless of the actual number of performances required of them. Stars, however, made special arrangements for a definite number of appearances a week, for which they must be paid, whether they actually acted that number of times or not. Besides, every prominent actor, at least once a year, expected a "benefit," the proceeds of which went into his own pockets. Boucicault is usually credited with having introduced the change to engagement of actors by "runs." Thus, for sixty years of the century, managers were driven to these uneconomical methods by that tyrant custom, which nowhere exerts a more potent sovereignty than on the stage. It is doubtful if the system could have been dispensed with earlier than 1860, for not until then did long runs of single plays become the usual practice. Throughout the earlier decades the triple bill, with frequent changes of plays and combinations of plays, created a demand similar to that of an opera troupe in our day. In 1809 Kemble at Covent Garden, in a desperate effort to satisfy the public, engaged three distinct companies: one for tragedy, one for comedy and farce, and a third for opera and ballet. Although the increase of price to the pit, upon which he had counted to make good his enormous expenditures, was baulked by the O. P. riots, Kemble managed to carry out his plans, and to maintain this colossal enterprise, which thereafter became the ideal if not the actual goal of the monopoly managers. The populace once addicted to this prodigality considered it a right imposed by the monopoly. Thus frenzied finance became established in the great theatres both by law and by custom.

From the lists of the companies annually printed in the *Theatrical Observer*, it appears that the number of performers (actors, singers, dancers, etc.) engaged in a single theatre ranged from sixty to one hundred. Besides, there were some two hundred musicians, and the lesser providers for the stage.

Bunn's attempt to avoid this enormous expenditure by uniting the two theatres, thus utilizing all of his company at one or the other on alternate nights, proved a failure. A single company so distributed, it was found, did not possess the same drawing power as two.

Even the supposed advantages of the large stock company were not what they have sometimes been represented to be. The star system existed also, and in a form which was not only detrimental to art, but ruinous to managers. The star brought the crowds then as now; and both managers and stars knew it to be so. Edmund Kean was the chief offender in this respect. John Philip Kemble had been content with an income of thirty-six pounds a week, and Mrs. Siddons with thirty pounds; but Kean, during his later years, demanded, and actually received, fifty pounds nightly. Kean's unquestionable supremacy, and the violent competition between the two monopoly houses, made him the master of the situation; and his own nature and habits were not such as to make him generous toward his failing managers.

At the time of the greatest depression, in 1830, Alexander Lee, who had recklessly undertaken the control of the rapidly sinking fortunes of Drury Lane, boldly declared that thereafter twenty-five pounds a week would be the highest salary paid to any performer. By the end of the season, however, he had learned the folly of his ways, for we read in the *Theatrical Observer:*

> It is singular enough that after all the threats about eternally extinguishing the stars with which the Drury Lane hemisphere commenced its new career, the "starring system" should have been carried to such an extent this season by the same management as never before at any theatre in London

— for example: — There is at per night — Mr. Kean, 50 pounds, M. Laporte, 15 pounds, Mr. Braham, 25 pounds, Mr. Liston, 12 pounds, 10 shillings, Miss Kelley, 10 pounds, besides minor pantomime stars.

Although the writer of this article may not have been exactly informed as to the salaries in the cases mentioned, the statement as a whole fairly represents the financial problems within the theatres as seen by the constantly failing managers. We must remember, too, that these performers were merely the prominent stars among a company of from eighty to a hundred actors, singers, and dancers.

Another immense drain upon the managers was the necessity — for by 1830 it had become a fixed practice — of "getting up" each year a considerable number of spectacles besides the Christmas pantomime. The adoption of spectacle as a means to draw the crowd had dated from the enlargement of the two major theatres; but under Kemble's management of Covent Garden it became almost the glory of that house. What the cost of the Christmas pantomimes was in the year 1828–29 is represented by the following list from the *Theatrical Observer*, which the writer declares "may be fully relied upon." It corresponds very closely to other similar statements I have seen.

Pantomime	at	Drury Lane	£1,870
"	"	Covent Garden	1,426
"	"	the Adelphi	500
"	"	Surrey	600
"	"	Coburg	400
"	"	Pavilion	100
"	"	Olympic	80

This was, in fact, a very modest expenditure on spectacle, for in 1823 Elliston was known to have spent £5,000 on one of the greatest of all stage displays, *The Cataract of* *the Ganges*. *The Coronation*, the year before, had cost him hardly less.[1]

Naturally, the practice of long runs was started with such "get ups." The tragedy or comedy of the program would be changed each evening, while *The Cataract of the Ganges* flowed its thrilling course through several consecutive months in the afterpiece.

Splendor in the representations of the literary drama was slower in making its appearance. Kemble had introduced an astonishing amount for his own day, but during the rage for Kean as a personality, the trapping out of tragedy became a secondary consideration. The case was not so with Macready, who was obliged to resort to every pictorial means of attracting his public. The managers of the large houses during the whole of our period remembered that Kemble, by reason of a troop of cavalry on the Covent Garden stage, had brought to his treasury the unheard-of sum of £100,000, and that Harris, who managed the same theatre until 1821, testified in a Chancery suit that only by means of pantomime had he been able to keep from bankruptcy.

Part of this expense in the more spectacular forms of drama was no doubt due to competition with the minors, because, in order to allure the regular patrons of these establishments to even the "half price" of the major houses, managers were obliged to compete in kind. By 1830 this competition had become very keen, in fact, desperate. After 1818, buoyed up by the hopes of greater opportunity, the minors had multiplied with great rapidity. Before 1841, nineteen such houses had come into existence, most of which, as will be seen from the diagram on p. 58, failed, and only three became important in the dramatic world. What this growth had meant to the majors — and to the minors it was even more disastrous —

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, no. 602, Oct. 28, 1823.

was voiced in 1839 by the *Era*, the official organ for the legitimate drama:

> An unthinking government with mistaken ideas have granted so many privileges and licensed so many minor theatres that the source of the national drama has been stopped. All the immense capital invested upon the faith of the laws has been sacrificed by shameful violations and infringements which the government have not only permitted but sanctioned.[1]

The fact, already noted, that from 1841 to 1866 no more theatres were built in London, is sufficient proof of the ruinous character of this competition. Even the bills for law-suits and parliamentary procedure must have amounted to no small sum.

Added to this discouragement came the negative fact, that, unlike many continental theatres, the English received no help of any kind from the state. If any of the legislation we have reviewed in a previous chapter was intended for such a purpose, it had not only failed, but had produced effects opposite to its intention. The truth seems to be that the English government at no time had taken a genuine interest in the stage, further than to make it amenable to its own dictates. The saddest fact of all had been that laws intended for the protection of theatres had been so deviously administered that they had not only ruined the theatres so protected, but had done no real service to those they had been construed to favor. When, in 1830, the majors and minors had come into open competition, it was not, after all, because the minor houses had risen in standard to what the monopoly houses should be, but rather that these protecting homes of the drama had so descended as to include in their programs, not only spectacles, opera, and ballet, but tight-rope performers, horses, and trained animals. It is hardly a wonder that Macready, when he found himself rated with such performers, and subordinated to them, proceeded literally to give Bunn a black eye. Later, as a manager, he perhaps came to realize that Bunn was quite as much the victim of governmental chicanery as Macready himself was a victim of the Bunn régime.

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[1] *Era*, May 5, 1839. The prices at the minor houses were much less than at the majors, ranging from boxes, 4*s*, pit 2*s*, gallery 1*s* to 2*s*, 1*s*, 6*d*.

Any one of the formidable array of causes of financial failure we have here reviewed would alone have been enough to complete the destruction of any art. The combination of them was overwhelming. The few theatres, even among the minors, that enjoyed success were poverty-stricken in comparison to almost any modern playhouse. Certainly at no time in England, and perhaps never elsewhere in the world, did the drama face such long-continued financial calamity. I believe it would not be far from the truth to say that during these years those concerned with the fate of the drama made a fight for its high standards as constant and heroic as can be claimed for workers in any other epoch. Granting their mistakes and their blindness, they nevertheless struggled with persistency and courage in the face of overwhelming odds. We should now review the principal efforts that these same abused managers put forth, in spite of formidable difficulties within and without. When their perplexities are fully understood, — and I hope the preceding chapters have sufficiently exposed them, — these men will appear not altogether the careless and unmeritorious trucklers to a depraved popular taste that they have almost universally been regarded. Some, at least, were heroes and undaunted champions of their art.

Chapter VII

EARLY MANAGEMENTS: KEMBLE AND ELLISTON

WE are now prepared to look behind the curtain. Not first at the completed scene, but rather at the brick walls, the green room, and the manager's den. Our object is to inspect those contributions to the stage which can be observed only behind the scenes. We want to watch the growth of the living histrionic art, and to do this not with the purpose of merely reviewing, but rather of laying bare its organism with the scrutiny of the vivisectionist. First, then, we shall follow the managers in their preparations, their ideals, their broad achievements; next, we shall examine the product of this labor, first in the background of scenery, and then in the living foreground of the actor's domain. Therefore, principles of management, scenic art, and styles of acting will occupy our attention in the succeeding chapters. In these seeming unessentials I believe that the important facts of the drama in our period are to be found. In them was the vitality of the art, and through them great progress was made toward the drama we call modern. No, our English drama was not imported bodily from France, Norway, Germany, or any other country. It grew up on the English stage, in a constantly varying and fascinating life. It mattered comparatively little whether writers of English origin were present to supply this life with its literary incentive: it went on in its individual and English way. When it borrowed from France, it Anglicized the product. When at last the nature and tendency of this life became clear to English writers, they did not fail to respond to its promptings. What the various forces shaping this independent life of the stage were, we shall now try to determine; and our first interest will be the managerial ideals and methods.

Before Kemble the current of progress on the stage had already strongly set in. Garrick had removed many anomalies and introduced reforms of a sweeping and beneficial character. He had removed the audience from the stage, given a finish and elegance to the art of acting, not only in his own performances, but in the total effect of his company, and had restored Shakespeare, in however crude a form, to a place of veneration from which he had fallen during the days of the pseudo-classical fallacies.

> At the period when Kemble came to London [Kemble's biographer admits], our theatres could boast many distinguished ornaments of the stage. . . . The great master of the art [Garrick] had formed in his own theatre [Drury Lane] some very respectable artists, who, from a long habit of acting together, had rendered their performances very smooth and attractive; and although no one actor greatly predominated, yet altogether they gave evidence that they had been well disciplined, that rehearsals had not been spared, and that every advantage had been drawn from existing materials.[1]

Kemble, however, did not inherit directly from Garrick, but began after several years of decadence under King. So bad were the conditions when Kemble assumed the management, that Boaden says:

> Upon the London stage nearly everything was to be done. The ancient Kings of England, or Scotland, or Denmark, wore the court dress of our own times (Garrick had not abandoned this practice) . . . nothing could be less accurate or more dirty than the usual pairs of low flats that were hurried together to denote the locality of the finest dialogue that human genius ever composed. . . .

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[1] Boaden's *Memoirs of J. P. Kemble*, i, 50.

> But the great reform was to take place in those parts of representation which nothing but propriety can raise above derision or disgust — the whole tribe of mobs, whether civil or military, plebeians, and their pasteboard and leathern properties.[1]

Boaden declares that Kemble spent in one revival as much as others had done for a whole season.

Here was no question of the simple, beautiful stage of impressionistic suggestion that some present-day reformers would have us imagine, when they argue that the detailed scenic representation given the poetic drama after Kemble has been an unmitigated evil. There was such scenic representation before Kemble, and the one thing to be said of it was that it was excessively bad. Particularizing further, Boaden declared:

> On even the stage trodden by Garrick [there was] architecture without selection or propriety, a hall, a castle, or a chamber; or a cut wood of which all the verdure seemed to have been washed away. Unquestionably all the splendour and the retinue of the stage came in, but did not die, with Mr. Kemble.[2]

When in 1788 Kemble assumed the management of Drury Lane, he presented to the proprietors of the theatre a declaration of independence. He refused to submit to the limitations imposed by them upon King, and demanded the right to present his plays in a fashion he thought becoming to their merit.

Since we must regard the work of Kemble more as a point of departure for our study than as an essential part of it, we may content ourselves with a hasty glance at his fundamental principles.

In the main direction of his activity there was no vagueness or uncertainty. He had made up his mind that "it was a waste of time," as his biographer states, "to repeat perpetually these 'modern instances' of total or partial failure; and that a grand permanent attraction might be given to Drury Lane by increasing the power of Shakepeare."[1]

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[1] Boaden, ii, 279.

[2] *Ibid.*, Intro., p. xx.

His ideals were to give "a more stately and perfect representation of his plays — to attend to all details as well as the grand features, and by aid of scenery and dress to perfect the dramatic illusion."[1] Boaden declares that Kemble, before assuming the direction of Drury Lane, gave himself up to the most painstaking study of histrionics and especially scenic effect, "reading with infinite pains everything pertaining to his art."[2]

Such was the creed of the "Kemble religion." Shakespeare was the one and only God, and Kemble — I say this seriously — was his reverent and modest prophet. He was reported to have asked: "What could be expected now in the way of the regular drama that previously had not been better done?"[3] Although Kemble and his sister, Mrs. Siddons, worked patiently and faithfully together in propagating this faith, they did not thrust themselves unwarrantably forward. They believed in the ensemble effect much more strongly than Garrick, who has often been considered the father of the star system. Kemble's ideal, in this respect, was "a little to curb the desire of the performers to exhibit in great characters, and get them to concur cheerfully in such a cast of plays, as should exhibit the full strength of the company, and do the utmost justice to the conceptions of the poet." Kemble's reason for taking this stand was the well-established custom of allowing the older members of the company the choice of parts. Even after Kemble became the manager of Drury Lane, he was diffident about assuming rôles which had habitually been assigned to the veterans of his company. Such deference he showed to old Bensley when he allowed that actor to play Wolsey, while he himself "doubled" in the parts of Cromwell and Griffith.[4] Boaden, his biographer, said of him, "He would do anything"; and this appears to be true, for Kemble never hesitated to take parts which were decidedly below his standard and personal dignity, and he assigned such parts also to his sister, Mrs. Siddons, who likewise considered herself absolutely the servant of the company.

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[1] Boaden, ii, 279. [2] *Ibid.*, iii, 281. [3] *Ibid.*, ii, 100.

[4] *The Lives of the Kembles*, by Fitzgerald, i, 283.

After the reconstruction of Drury Lane in 1794, he was allowed for a while a much freer hand in the fulfilment of his managerial ideals. Unlike King, his predecessor, he enjoyed Sheridan's full confidence, and repaid it by a profound admiration for that wayward genius. For several years he mounted his productions with "unparalleled" splendor, and in doing so he enjoyed the approval of his superiors, for it was soon discovered that, in the large theatres, mere acting was not enough to attract the crowds, for which reason Sheridan had made the costly change. Speaking with enthusiasm of the preparations made for the opening performance of *Macbeth* at the new Drury Lane, Mrs. Siddons in writing to her friend, Lady Harcourt, remarked: "I am told that the banquet is a thing to go and see of itself." Fitzgerald regards this fact, admitted and revelled in by the Kembles, as full of evil omen for the Shakespearean drama. Much is to be said for Fitzgerald's point of view. His words came back to me, not many years ago, at a performance of the banquet scene in Mr. Tree's spectacular production at His Majesty's Theatre. By means of electric lights the ghost was seen to walk behind the tapestries half-way around the room, and then through the back of a chair in which he sat, with all the trickery of the "magician's" art. So interested had I become in this elaborate occultism that I lost all feeling for the scene. A ghost made up of electric lights has no terror whatever for anyone but children, and the only interest to be taken in it is to wonder how it has been managed.

How different the effect of this same scene, carried out with astounding skill in one of Mr. Greet's Elizabethan settings! But we must not forget that a return to Elizabethan settings on Mr. Kemble's stage was unthinkable; that the scenic effects on the old Drury Lane stage of Garrick were neither exceedingly simple and tasteful nor even good; and that the contemporary mood of expressive staging was not thought of. We must remember also that a popular taste was to be satisfied, which in the large theatre would have failed to respond to mere acting, however good. It is fairly certain, at any rate, that without the aid of such settings, the plays of the master poet during the last century would have failed of the wide popular appeal they actually made. It is equally certain that no other plays, with equal or superior illustration, could possibly have enjoyed a hundredth part of this popularity. With Kemble, the treatment was always a reverent one. He did not use a play of Shakespeare's, even to the extent that Garrick had done, to display himself and the members of his family, but, rather, he did his best to give to the works of his master the noblest treatment of which he and his company were capable. He was aware of no other method than that of painstaking study, and to this he gave himself without stint. Malone, Steevens, and Reed aided him in his Shakespearean researches, and a vast library, collected at a considerable expenditure, supplied him with every suggestion for improving the art of his stage.

Garrick's method had been the reverse. Upon pantomime and spectacle he had lavished expense, but the works of Shakespeare, with himself in the chief parts, might be trusted to draw without the useless expenditure necessary to make a go of a new and untried pantomime. His costuming and scenery were neither suggestive nor appropriate. Kemble's treatment was a step in advance, and the result of his work was to establish the plays of Shakespeare upon the London stage for one whole century. Otherwise they might have been relegated to the schoolroom, to serve as the deadwood of learning.

It is true that Kemble was not as whole-hearted in his devotion to Shakespeare as the statements attributed to him would indicate. If he was convinced that any kind of play whatsoever would make an appeal to his audience, he was not above the representation of it, and even a participation in it. Shortly after assuming the direction of Drury Lane, he produced with magnificent scenic realism a piece which would later have been called a melodrama, in which there was a superb ballet, but in which the chief attraction was the storming of a Tartar fortress followed by a conflagration and a terrific battle.

His avowed hostility to contemporary playwrights did not extend to such of them as he knew would draw audiences. These were not infrequently of the meaner order. He gave no end of pains to the production of "Monk" Lewis's *Castle Spectre*, and even trained himself to crawl through a window in a manner more appropriate to an acrobat than to London's great tragedian; he gave a cold reception to young Colman, whose *Iron Chest* it was often charged — although Boaden defends Kemble against the accusation — he had deliberately caused to fail.

Since the reputation of Kemble as a manager rests chiefly upon his reforms in Shakespearean illustration, it is perhaps well to examine them a little more closely. He professed a most pedantic interest in the accuracy of his settings, costuming, and "correct" reading of the lines. Surely his reforms in such respects were extreme. He abolished the merely conventional costuming of Shakespeare in dresses but slightly removed from contemporary usage, and mounted each play as nearly as possible with the habits and scenic surroundings of its period.

His pretensions in this respect, however, were frequently much in advance of his actual achievement. Some of his innovations were little short of ridiculous. In *Macbeth* his stage was filled with singing witches,[1] and he brought in the black, gray, and white spirits in human form, by dressing up bands of little boys in the various colors. *Hamlet* was fitted out in the style of Vandyke. *Coriolanus* was given in a late Roman setting rather than one befitting the age of the Consuls. In most of his plays, the intention was more conspicuous than the success. His work must be regarded as that of a pioneer, however, and as such it was wonderfully thorough and impressive in his own age. It was picturesque and dignified in the main, and the imperfections and absurdities were such as only later generations, who have inherited the work of Macready, Kean, and Irving, might find amusing. In his own day all were ready to admit that he had rendered the greatest possible service to the works of Shakespeare and the older dramatists.

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[1] Fitzgerald, *Lives of the Kembles*, i, 282.

Whether his staging was intended to illustrate great drama or merely to attract by its spectacular beauty, it was always refined. Boaden's claim for his admired friend was not an exaggeration, when, after a ballet representing the Alexandrine period, he declared: "Mr. Kemble had now realized his plan of acting the sterling old plays with a perfection never before attempted; and of *directing the appetite for noise and show to objects in which the refined taste found even superior gratification to that enjoyed by the crowd for whose amusement they had principally been designed.*"[1]

In spite of his high aims, Kemble's life was cast amid dramatic misfortunes, so that the promise of his earlier years was never realized. The failing fortunes of Sheridan, Kemble's desertion, his adoption of Covent Garden, and his long period of management at that house, with its frank abandonment to the craze for opera and spectacle, its destruction by fire, and its period of O. P. riots — all these untoward experiences stood in the way of a larger accomplishment in the interests of dramatic art. The earlier spirit of thoroughness and the rigid rehearsing for harmonious effect were no doubt relaxed. After 1812 his presence was no longer felt as a positive force on the London stage. He had completed his work, and was entering upon a period of decline. It would perhaps have been wise for him to imitate his sister's example and retire in 1812, rather than to continue, as he did, until 1817, when the rage for Kean made it clear that Kemble could never again command the public as in the early Drury Lane period. After a tour of other English cities, Kemble triumphantly returned to Covent Garden and gave a farewell repetition of his great parts. An affectionate and respectful public testimonial and banquet afforded him a theatrically effective exit. But with all this splendid ovation there lurked no doubt a deep personal sense of tragic defeat both for his ideals and his reputation as an actor. It seemed to many, at any rate, that the Covent Garden stage, on which, at about the same time that Kemble withdrew, Macready began his splendid labors under conditions not unlike those attending Kemble's own first efforts, was a stage on which "everything was to be done."

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[1] Boaden, ii, 140. The italics are mine.

> Oh! Great Lessee! Great Manager! Great Man!
> Oh, Lord High Elliston!

So sang John Hamilton Reynolds. "Amid all the impostors that ever appeared we know of no parallel instance of quackery, impudence, mendacity, and ignorance." So commented a writer of Elliston memoirs. Somewhere between these extremes, with leanings toward both, stands the amazing figure of Robert Elliston. A man who enjoyed the admiration and friendship of Charles Lamb and the well-merited scorn of the meanest personage in his theatre: such was the "Great Lessee." Upon no showman since the days of Rich had more contempt been heaped; and yet no manager of the English stage, perhaps, was endowed with such versatile genius; with perfect composure he could turn from the highest reaches of the intellect to the lowest and most contemptible blandishments. With this strange servant of the muses, however, the progress of the dramatic art in England during the first two decades of the century was inextricably associated.

His masterpiece was his dramatization of himself. From his first appearance in London on June 25, 1796, until his physical collapse in 1826, he hedged himself with that especially dangerous divinity of the theatre. His fortune, even if his inclinations had been different, would hardly have allowed him to do otherwise. His first great success was a triumph in a rôle in which the great Kemble had as miserably failed. Within a few years, as leading comedian of the great London theatres, his popularity was so great that he was obliged to take his benefit in the Italian Opera House. On this occasion he manifested unmistakably that supreme gift of extemporaneous cajolery which amounted to a new type of oratory, capable of mastering the most impassioned audiences. This, if any, was his principle of management. On that occasion, the crowds at the doors were so great that they broke through into the house, admitting many who had paid no admission whatever. He came forward, his hand on his heart — this was his habitual pose — and calling the attention of his friends to the loss that he must incur by such a proceeding, announced that plates would be passed to receive the fees not paid at the gate. When the curtain rose, a considerable audience was assembled on the stage in the manner of the early English theatre. There were indignant cries of "Off, off!" Elliston came forward once more. Expressing great willingness to comply with the wishes of his audience, he nevertheless reminded them that, only a short while before, Madame Bouti, a foreigner, had without protest allowed friends to sit on the stage at her benefit, and he respectfully prayed that the same indulgence would be granted a Briton. His net receipts were £600![1]

Here was truly a demagogue among actors. He had unbounded faith in the good nature and the gullibility of the public, and even in their love of fraud. His managerial career consists almost entirely of anecdotal effrontery, in which it is often difficult to know whether he meant to be flippant or serious. Perhaps he was merely deluded into a belief in his fiction of himself. This evidently is Archer's conclusion, for, after citing the anecdote of his dinner in honor of the King's birthday, in which Elliston had arranged for a cannon to be shot from his roof to impress all London with the respect he was paying his fellow sovereign, Archer remarks that this act was an epitome of Elliston himself. It is generally believed that in his famous coronation spectacle, when he on one occasion extended his hands over the amazed pittites, and pronounced a blessing on "my people," he was actually living, and not acting, the audaciously grotesque scene.

In proportion as he had faith in the public, he had contempt for the public press. He told his New York friends that "the greatest curse upon a theatre, in my opinion, is the —— public press." Its only utility was its puffing of Elliston, and of this resource Elliston made ample use. His playbills, as we have already seen, were the derision of the sensible, the delight of the easily amused, and the delusion of the ignorant. His masterpiece in publicity occurred when he was manager of Drury Lane. To make Kean's return to his theatre after the American tour properly suggestive to the popular imagination, he organized a procession to meet and conduct him to the theatre, much as a circus man parades his elephant or giraffe to fill his tents. Thus he paraded Shakespeare in "burlettas" at the Surrey, Byron against his will at Drury Lane, and his own greater self at the Olympic. In each case he had rightly judged the popular temper.

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[1] Anecdote cited by Hutton and Mathews in *Lives of the Actors*, from W. Clark Russell, *Representative Actors*, pp. 295 ff.

Never was he so much the master as when, hand on heart, he came forward to calm a raging public. No doubt they sometimes worked themselves into indignation for the very pleasure of being so assuaged. Two such speeches will serve to show the extraordinary aplomb with which he could meet a wholly unforeseen situation, and after a few words learn the disposition of his protesters, meet the issue squarely, and turn the dispute to his own profit.

One of these was delivered at the Surrey in response to gallery disturbances. "Ladies and gentlemen," began the manager with his usual suavity, which the most elegant might not rival,

> I venture as a most unobtrusive individual to take the great liberty of addressing you. It is a rare occurrence that I deem it necessary to place myself in juxtaposition with you. [*Noise in the gallery.*] When I said juxtaposition I meant *vis-à-vis*. [*Increased noise.*] When I uttered the word *vis-à-vis* I meant contactibility. Now let me tell you that *vis-à-vis*, which is a French term, and juxtaposition, which is truly an English term, very nearly assimilate each other. [*Disturbance redoubled.*] Gentlemen, gentlemen, I am really ashamed of your conduct. It is unlike a Surrey audience. Are you aware that I have in this establishment most efficient peace officers at my immediate disposal? Peace officers, gentlemen, mean persons necessary in times of war. A word to the wise. — One word more — if that gentleman in the carpenter's cap will sit down [*pointing to the pit*] the little girl in the red ribbon behind him — you, my love, I mean — will be able to see the entertainment.

Such magic audacity rarely failed to subdue his audience.

More telling yet was his wonderful address before an indignant Drury Lane audience in 1822. It was the more extraordinary because it bordered on the tragic. His season had been a failure. His public had been exasperated in particular by the frequent use of the farce *Monsieur Tonson* as the afterpiece. Spectacle had almost banished the drama. A farce was advertised in which Munden was to appear; but that great comedian, at the last minute, failed. No sufficient announcement was made of the fact, and when the curtain rose for the second part of the performance, the audience was outraged beyond measure to hear the opening words of the familiar *Monsieur Tonson.* Cooper came forward with the manager's apologies. This was not enough. Elliston was brought out, in a wretched state of health and spirits, to receive the burst of public indignation. The "Great Lessee" was equal to the emergency.

> The public apology made by Mr. Cooper, has been received by the sensible part of the audience. [*Great disapprobation.*] Is this conduct proper, thus to endeavor to injure the property of the theatre without any cause? It is most improper. [*Increased confusion and cries of* "*no reflections.*"] I do not mean to cast reflections; but can I prevent the dispensations of Providence? Can I bring Mr. Munden from his bed of sickness?

Having thus produced a measure of calm he brought on another storm by a declaration that he was to substitute a better farce. "If this does not satisfy you," exclaimed the orator, rising to the full height of injured innocence,

> leave the house, you who are riotous, and your money shall be returned to you. [*Applause.*] Has not illness been allowed as a good plea in every theatre in the world, and will it be denied to me? [*Cries of* "*No! No!*"] Is this the fair play that I am to expect at the hands of a British audience? No man can tell when a dispensation of Providence may occur; and why, therefore, when it does, why should it be necessary for me to come forward? It was by the merest accident that I happened to be here to-night, and would it not have been very hard, had I been away, to have interrupted the performance, because that had taken place which no man could prevent?

Then, on the verge of tears,—and Elliston could play the tragic,—he added: "Gentlemen, press not too hardly upon a fallen man."

The play was allowed to proceed. Cæsar at Capua was hardly more the master of his mutinous troops. His biographer, Raymond, was right when he thus epitomized Elliston and his work:

> We may, in fine, term him as a kind of dramatic Alcibiades: great versatility, eccentric enterprise, strange inconsistencies, with a fervent devotion to the public duties to which fortune had called him, constituted him in his time, if not an exemplary general, at least a brilliant soldier.

And to what end? What ideals did he serve? What were his great motives of ambition? For surely one who fights as constantly, and for such great stakes, as Elliston, has beneath his self-deception some guiding principle which makes it possible for him to live at peace with the consciousness of his own rogueries. One seeks in vain for any consistent policy either in his choice of main routes or in the organization of his expedition. His bold fight for the minors, which was described in the chapter on theatrical monopoly, would, according to surface appearances, indicate a laudable ambition to raise the minors to a plane of respectability in the life of the larger city. In magnificent irony, while manager of the Olympic in 1818, he cried: "Horses must be found to prance, if possible, more classically than those who sustained the regular and national drama of *Timour the Tartar*. And larger water tubs must be bought than those used for the support of the regular stage." When, however, he had himself turned manager of Drury Lane, in 1820, he not only abused the minor houses mercilessly, but he also went to unheard-of extremes in the production of animal and water drama, as witness *The Coronation* and *The Cataract of the Ganges*, for the latter of which he expended £5,000, even equipping his theatre with a costly new water system. If occasionally he took pains to adorn the legitimate drama, as in the case of Kean's *Lear*, he sought rather to rival the Kembles at Covent Garden, or to increase even Kean's insufficient popularity, than to make the work of his theatre more artistic or more worthy of Shakespeare, whose master-genius he was among the first to worship.

As a man of greatness, he was petty beyond belief; as a petty man, he was sublime. His fiction of himself as monarch of the stage led him to crushing and ignominious defeat as tragic as that to which Napoleon's belief in his destiny led that better-known hero. If we might scrutinize the working of Elliston's mentality, we should probably find as the basis of its operation the stock formula of the demagogue and the yellow journalist, that to help the people you must first get their attention. Elliston, like most men who have proceeded on this principle, never got beyond the period of attracting the popular attention. It is a tragic fact that, when he was to put before his London public the finest impersonation of Falstaff that even Macready, who witnessed the rehearsal, could conceive, Elliston's strength failed him. The victim of many debauches collapsed during the second of two feeble performances, and was carried away forever from the stage of Drury Lane, where, until the last, he had no doubt dreamed of creating a new era of dramatic splendor with himself as its *roi soleil*. Thence he retired in disgrace to his old Surrey house, appearing infrequently in the characters that had once made him the idol of London. The major managers, for very pity, seem not to have brought the law seriously against him.

Thus passed from the stage a man who, by force of genius, had risen from obscurity to a height that not only dazzled the public, but overcame his own better sense. He had been a rival of the greatest in his own profession. He had managed theatres in all parts of the kingdom.

The small he had made to cringe before him, and the great had sought his favor. He was the proud manager of Edmund Kean and William Macready; he had enjoyed the admiration of his monarch, and his queen; and by universal acclaim he had been pronounced "the Great Lessee." Archer has characterized him as the "transition [manager] from the good old days of the patent theatres to our railroad times of puff and 'boom.'" There can be no doubt of the "puff and 'boom.'" The transition that he marked, however, went no further than his personal attempt to outstrip all others in a business sense. He saw in the rising minor houses the possibility of a great personal victory; and while he labored in this delusion, he made the majors his enemy. Failing to fulfil his expectations at the minors, he turned to the majors as friend and protector, and made the minors his enemy. He did more, however, than anyone else to hasten the fall of the monopoly, for he not only helped to advance the minors, but he personally superintended the ruin of the majors.

Here, then, let us leave these two great forces in English theatrical management, John Kemble and Robert Elliston. Kemble, the embodiment of England's legitimate traditions; Elliston, the great apostate, and the first great huckster of the "illegitimate." The one a monument of dignity, the other without one particle of dignity or even of self-respect, but each convinced that the fate of the drama was in his keeping. One lived for and with the people and acted himself into their favor both on and off the stage. This was Elliston, and herein, perhaps, lay his greatest glory. With him the drama was a thing of the people and for the people. The other lived and moved in a world not only far above the people, but above mortality in general. That was Kemble. Even when he debated in the green-room with Brinsley Sheridan, he talked like Jove the Thunderer. One in the eyes of posterity was all that is cringing, contemptible, and perniciously clever; the other has ascended to the clouds of dramatic fame, and will rest there securely to the end of time. Who can say, however, that the man who brought the drama to the level of the people and, in so doing, raised the people in some measure toward the drama, was not rendering an equally great, if not a greater service. Certain it is, that in the stage developments that Elliston set in motion, rather than in those that Kemble brought to an end, was to be found the beginning of distinctly new things for the English drama. If they were bad in themselves, they were at least a necessary preliminary to any progress whatsoever. Kemble was the apotheosis of the old; and Elliston, the Dionysiac reveller in the new.

Chapter VIII

PIONEERS OF REFORM IN MANAGEMENT: MACREADY

THE Kemble religion" and the Elliston apostasy typify the state of dramatic affairs from which our study is to progress. At Drury Lane the committee which succeeded to the position of management had not fulfilled its promise. Only the coming of Kean in 1814 had saved it from an overwhelming failure; and Kean betrayed little interest in his art that was not merely personal.

Under him the evils of the "star system," as then understood, reached their height, and stage effect as a whole was completely neglected. The exigencies of the triple bill and a nightly change of performance, even in the case of Kemble's early management of Drury Lane, as attested by the careless rehearsing of Colman's *Iron Chest*, made impossible any adequate attention to rehearsing and the ensemble effect. Even at Covent Garden, where the Kemble traditions were strongest, we find that by the time of Macready's appearance, the preparations for any new piece, aside from its scenic illustration, were most meagre. At Elliston's Drury Lane Theatre we know that every actor was allowed — in fact, he was expected — to read his part according to his own conception of it. "You must paint your own picture," was the favorite advice of James Wallack, Elliston's stage manager.[1] It was not safe for him, however, to outshine the star or to depart daringly from tradition. Tomlins, a contemporary observer, was probably right in calling Kean "the father of that illiterate and narrow-minded taste of only regarding one character in the play, seeking and caring for only the production of effects." [1]

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[1] See Clement Scott, *The Drama of Yesterday*, i, 72.

Macready, in his reminiscences of the early Covent Garden days under Harris and the Kembles, — he made his début in 1817,—declares that anything but the merest line rehearsal was unusual. Any attempt on the part of a member of the cast to put feeling or other effect into his reading appeared ridiculous to the company.[2]

> It was the custom of London actors [he asserts], especially of the leading one, to do little more at rehearsals than read or repeat the words of their parts, marking on them their entrances and exits, as settled by the stage-manager, and their respective places on the stage. To make any display of passion or energy would be to expose oneself to the ridicule or sneers of the green room.

The effect of this slovenliness is indicated by Hazlitt's frequent assaults upon the managements. Reviewing a performance of Kean's *Othello*, this critic gave Kean enthusiastic praise for his individual efforts but said: "The rest of the play was by no means judiciously cast; indeed, almost every individual appeared to be out of his proper place." [3] In 1820, he generalized as follows:

> We never, or very rarely indeed, see a play well acted in all its parts. At Drury Lane there is only one tragic actor, Mr. Kean; all the rest are supernumeraries. At Covent Garden they lately had one great tragic actress, Miss O'Neill; and two or three actors that were highly respectable, at least in second-rate tragic characters. At present the female throne in tragedy is vacant. . . . Macready is the only one who draws houses or finds admirers.[4]

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[1] *A Brief View of the English Stage*, p. 74.

[2] Macready's *Reminiscences*, chap. x.

[3] *View of the English Stage*, 1818, republishing a review for May 6, 1814.

[4] A review in the *London Magazine*.

The characteristics of stage management, then, in spite of the admirable work of Kemble, appeared, at least after 1812, to be: careless and insufficient rehearsals; individual freedom in the conception and acting of a part within the limits of well-established traditions; and, worst of all, the star system in its most tyrannical form. In all these respects, great improvements came about in the London theatres during the period of this study. Two workers previous to the Bancroft management of the Prince of Wales's Theatre in 1865 had performed the major part of this service: they were Macready and Madame Vestris. It is our present purpose to examine carefully their contributions to the art of stage management.

Macready had begun his reforms long before he became a manager himself. Despite the scoffers of the Covent Garden company, he had made the start the very year of his début. The following is his own account of the proceeding:

> The difficulty of obtaining before an audience perfect self-possession, which only practice can give, made me resolve to rehearse with the same earnestness as I should act; reasoning with myself that if practice were of the value attributed to it, this would be a mode of multiplying its opportunities. . . . Upon making the experiment, I may quote Dryden's line, "'T is easy said, but oh! how hardly tried!" I found it much more difficult to force myself to act in the morning with the cold responses and composed looks of Miss O'Neill, Young, and the rest, than at night before the most crowded auditory. . . . The task I found a very hard one, but I fought successfully against my *mauvaise honte* and went doggedly to it.[1]

How rapidly the example he set was followed by the others in his company, he did not say. For twenty years he was not himself in a position to require such exertions from the rest of the company. When Macready, as such critics as Hazlitt remarked, had become the only member of the Covent Garden company who could draw houses and command interest, probably his fellow actors began to notice and follow his lead.

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[1] *Reminiscences*, Edited by Sir Frederick Pollock, chap. x, year 1817.

This bold innovation at rehearsals was the most influential and radical change in the manner and tone of acting that had been known since, at least, the days of Garrick. When one realizes how essential rehearsals of the kind Macready instituted are to the most unpretentious performance in contemporary stage art, it becomes clear that before this time no approach to genuinely realistic, or even polished, acting was possible.

Under Macready's management for the first time during the century London saw its literary drama carefully acted in all its parts. Emphasis was laid especially upon the interrelation and harmony of all the rôles. If Kemble had handled crowds effectively, and had raised them above the derision they had excited in former times, Maccready utilized them for striking dramatic effect. Coleman, after many years, remembered still with wonder and admiration the superb effect Macready had contrived to produce from the simple direction: "Exeunt soldiers bearing the body of Caius Marcus." [1]

Macready's two attempts at management were made during the monopoly period, and therefore at the two large theatres. Later, his experiments would undoubtedly have been made at a small house, for he expressed himself to this effect in the closing address after the last of these financially unsuccessful ventures. As early as 1832 he had declared before the committee of Parliament his personal preference for the small houses. His first attempt, the more successful of the two, was at Covent Garden from 1837 to 1839; the second at Drury Lane from 1841 to 1843. These endeavors of Macready's were regarded by all who loved the drama as the last hope of the English stage. In each case, Macready succeeded Bunn in the lesseeship. This much-abused gentleman had taken the great theatres, first singly and then together, in a desperate attempt to save them from ruin. He leased Drury Lane after Price, Lee, and Polhill had made a continuous failure of it since Elliston's expulsion in 1826. No one of these managers, however, was the object of so much abuse as was heaped upon Bunn. His own published defence seemed only to have heightened the obloquy. "Huckster," "showman," "panderer to a depraved taste" were some of the milder expressions applied to him. No doubt he merited rebuke for his indifference to the obligations imposed upon him by his patent rights. His treatment of Macready was generally cited as proof positive of his callousness to the higher demands of his calling. To make room for Bunn's trashy afterpieces, Macready found himself cast to perform only three acts of *Richard III*, whereupon, in a fit of righteous indignation, he visited the unhappy manager and assaulted him in a manner so brutal that Macready repented of it afterward.

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[1] John Coleman, *Players and Playwrights I Have Known*, i, 19.

Bunn made some efforts in the interests of the legitimate, for he gave the young Charles Kean his first engagement after his discouraging début. Besides, he was the first manager to accept for the legitimate stage a play by Douglas Jerrold in his later style making pretensions to the higher ranks of drama.[1]

Granting that Bunn made no heroic self-sacrifice to keep the "banners of the legitimate flying," it is now certain that, if he had done so, he would have met with failure earlier than it actually visited him. Bunn's attitude was no more a cause than it was an effect of the forces at play on the contemporary stage. Some of his assertions in defence of his management are incontrovertible. It was, he declared, humanly impossible to keep the majors filled except by every available resource of the showman. Macready had never proved to be an attraction of the magnitude of Kean, and it was literally true that Malibran, Ducrow's horses, and Van Amburgh's trained lions were necessary to keep Bunn from the poorhouse. As it was, he retired from the stage loaded with an enormous debt, although he possessed no mean administrative ability, and although a reduction of rental had been granted him from the £10,000 exacted annually of Elliston at Drury Lane, to £5,000 each for the two great monopoly houses which Bunn combined.

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[1] *The Bride of Ludgate*, 1831.

When Macready began his Covent Garden career, in 1837, the *litterati* rallied about him, giving their encouragement and proudly courting his favor. Prominent among them were Dickens, Browning, Bulwer-Lytton, and Jerrold. Access to his green room became a highly coveted honor, even among the great. John Forster, in the *Examiner*, brought his critical ability — the most notable that then reviewed the stage — unstintedly to Macready's support. Old play-goers, devotees, and members of the profession did all in their power to make a success of this "last stand" of the legitimate drama.

Even in this earlier and more prosperous of Macready's two engagements, the literary results were disappointing. Besides the most promising success of Bulwer-Lytton's *Lady of Lyons* and *Richelieu*, and a few poor plays by Knowles, nothing of note was accomplished. Macready's attitude toward contemporary writers was not so ungenerous as that of Kemble. His tastes, however, were much more fastidious. He took no interest in any play which did not measure up to the old models of tragedy and comedy. Against the more popular influences of the day, such as melodrama and the various forms of burlesque realism, he was immovably and not unjustly set. Work of this sort, it must be admitted, was as yet trivial, crude, and, except for Madame Vestris's, inartistic. He saw in it no possibility of a worthy dramatic type, and he gave it no encouragement. Possibly, too, he was still smarting under the indignities inflicted upon him in his younger days at Covent Garden, where he had been forced by his superiors to play the melodramatic villains. So great was his aversion to this type of work that, whenever he signed an engagement contract, he had a clause inserted to the effect that he was not to be required to play parts "partaking of melodramatic character."

To the pretentious imitators of Shakespearean drama Macready looked for a modern awakening. Knowles, Bulwer-Lytton, Walker, Sheil, Barry Cornwall, Miss Mitford, and Browning at various times excited his hopes, but none realized them. Although Jerrold was often in his circle, as chance references in the diaries indicate, Macready appears to have given him very little consideration as a dramatist. Of Boucicault we find hardly a word. Even Dickens received no encouragement from Macready, and Dickens was one of his most intimate companions and supporters. Entries such as the following in the diaries are of interest on this point:

> *Nov.* 8 (1838). . . . Forster came into my room and proposed, on the part of Dickens, the dramatization of *Oliver Twist* with Dickens' name. Nothing can be kinder than this generous intention of Dickens, but I fear it is not acceptable.
>
> *Nov.* 9. . . . Forster sent me the volumes of *Oliver Twist*, which I looked carefully through — occupied me more than the whole day.
>
> *Nov.* 10. . . . Forster and Dickens called; and told them of the utter impracticability of *Oliver Twist* for any dramatic purpose.

Dickens in 1838 had made one other attempt, at Macready's request, in his farce, *The Lamp-Lighter*. Macready pronounced it unsatisfactory and did not accept it.

In spite of Macready's abhorrence of the newer style of writing for the stage, it is a tragic irony that his subsequent reputation has been that of a great melodramatic actor. Without, apparently, detecting the framework, the sentimentality, and the domesticity of melodrama in the works of Knowles, Bulwer-Lytton, and Byron, Macready pinned his faith to such authors because they were "poetical," and because their plays afforded Macready his greatest triumphs. Not as Hamlet or Lear or Macbeth did his public chiefly admire him, but as Virginius, Richelieu, and, perhaps most of all, as Werner.[1]

To say that he would have been justified in adopting a more encouraging attitude toward contemporary playwrights is more than we can do with any certainty. It seems strange, however, that he should not have given more aid and encouragement to those like Jerrold, Dickens, and perhaps Thackeray, who with such an incentive might have made a far more determined effort to create out of the life of the day a drama worthy of nineteenth-century English literature.

Macready's claims to distinction were made in important but less vital aspects of his profession. Had his tact, his enthusiasm, and his dramatic powers equalled his high ideals, his industry, and his ambition, his management would no doubt have done more to effect a dramatic revolution than any we have to consider. In Macready, however, the spirit of the prophet, and even the optimistic enthusiasm of the reformer, were lacking; the diligence of the scholar and the stubborn will of the man of ambition took their place. His efforts are memorable not so much for their novelty, suggestiveness, and artistic distinction, as for good taste, harmonious effect, scholarly thoroughness, and resolute courage in the face of repeated failure.

His work as an actor we shall consider in our treatment of the progress of that art. In this respect more, perhaps, than in any other he followed the trend of the times. Otherwise he chose principally to live in the spirit of the past. His achievement was not so much an advancement of dramatic art as it was a squaring of the dramatic account up to date. He gave the best work of other times a representation that was in all respects worthy of itself and of his own ideals. His dreams were of a glorious dramatic past, which he hoped to make vital again for the enjoyment of the better spirits of his own age. His chief endeavor, like that of Kemble, was devoted to Shakespeare, whose great plays, especially the tragedies, Macready illustrated for the London public more adequately than any previous manager. Availing himself to the full of the advanced scenic art of Stanfield and Marshall, of Planché's thorough knowledge of ancient costume, and of his own literary scholarship, he was able by far to excel all previous efforts in authenticity. In this respect our age owes most to his determined restoration of the Shakespearean texts, freed from all interpolated matter, whether by Dryden, Cibber, or Tate. Under Macready, for the first time, the fool was heard to speak with Lear, and Miranda was liberated from her Dryden-made shadow.

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[1] Indicative of the popular opinion of Macready's melodramatic skill was a list of his rôles in "order of excellence" published in the *Theat. Jour.*, April 18, 1850: 1. Werner, 2. Richelieu, 3. Iago, 4. Jachimo, 5. Tell, 6. Virginius, 7. King of the Commons, 8. King Lear, 9. King John, 10. Cassius, 11. Kitely, 12. Hamlet.

His ideals in such reforms he set forth as follows at the farewell banquet:

> My hope and my intention was, if my abilities had kept pace with them, to have left in our theatres the complete series of Shakespeare's acting plays, his text purified from the gross interpolations that disfigure it and distort his characters, and the system of rearrangement so perfected throughout them, that our stage would have presented, as it ought, one of the best illustrated editions of the poet's works.

Macready worked under conditions which limited his success. As we have said, he was not a creative revolutionary, nor was he the apostle of any clearly defined school of dramatic art. His advance beyond the work of his great predecessors was more in degree than in kind. He raised his art, in spite of what to Bunn and many others had proved insuperable obstacles, a good deal nearer to the level of his own somewhat pompous intellectual and moral aspirations.

Another limitation upon Macready's achievement was inordinate vanity, ruthlessly bared in his diaries. He was habitually in agony at the thought of rivals. He shared Kean's fondness for the star system, even if he did not allow the tyranny of it such free play in his productions. The following instances of suffering vanity sufficiently illustrate this temper. Macready had just engaged Phelps as his leading subordinate. The diaries record the effect of Phelps's first London appearance:

> *August* 29 (1837). . . . Sent for the *Morning Herald*, and read the account of Mr. Phelps' appearance, which seems to me a decided success. It depressed my spirits, though perhaps it should not do so. If he is greatly successful, I shall reap the profits; if moderately, he will strengthen my company. But an actor's fame and his dependent income is so precarious that we start at every shadow of an actor. It is an unhappy life!

It would be unfair to deduce from such confessions — and there are many — that Macready's managerial policy was always determined by selfish fear. In the main he sought to give the members of his company all reasonable advantage. We are told that on one occasion he rashly surrendered Othello to Phelps, while he himself played Iago. He did not repeat the experiment. Although he did not deliberately suppress members of his company or lessen their effectiveness, he did not, it would appear, develop exceedingly the artistry of his associates. Aside from Phelps we hear of few of them later at the forefront of their profession; and Phelps was already accomplished when Macready engaged him.

In spite of all Macready could do, the effects of monopoly made impossible a revolutionary success. After his relinquishment of Covent Garden in 1839, he discovered that, to be heard at all in conditions worthy of his ability, he must return to management. In 1841 he leased Drury Lane, abandoned successively by Hammond, Julien, and Bunn. Although he made even greater efforts than before, he failed, just as Bunn might have predicted. His new plays, like Gerald Griffin's *Gissippus*, Browning's *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, and Marston's *Patrician's Daughter*, failed to draw. Even the older repertory no longer attracted. Macready against his will was obliged to resort to pageantry and opera. In spite of these concessions, he failed. It is, however, to his glory that he stooped to no contemptible form of entertainment. Even his spectacles were set to the words of Shakespeare and Dryden.

The times were now ripe for Bunn. The freeing of the theatres in 1843 removed from Drury Lane the last obligation of respectability, and in the following year Bunn returned to his own. For a time the works of Balfe and Wallace gave promise of creating in the old theatre a home of English opera — a promise that was never fulfilled. Balfe's *The Enchantress*, *The Bohemian Girl*, *The Bondman*, and *The Maid of Honor*, and Wallace's *Maritana* and *Matilda*, for a time drew enthusiastic crowds. Otherwise, with few exceptions, whether under Bunn or his successors, the theatre was abandoned to everything, from a French circus to Italian opera — except, of course, English drama. In stemming this deluge Macready had indeed deserved the name of tragic hero.

In general, Macready's aims were the highest, and his example established a policy followed, for the glory of the stage, in a long line of managements, of which Sir Henry Irving's at the Lyceum and Sir Beerbohm Tree's at His Majesty's are the most conspicuous recent instances. Without making undue claims for his respectable record, or believing even that his presentation of Shakespeare was extraordinary, we may still assert that his improvements constituted a real advance over anything seen on the English stage in illustration of the poetic drama since the Restoration, if not since the beginning of English stagecraft. Macready hastened the progress of scenic and ensemble representation by at least a decade. His contemporaries, from the Queen to the gallery "gods," recognized his ability and his contributions to the drama. Whether because of his lack of personal magnetism or because of the unfavorable state of dramatic affairs, he nevertheless disappointed their hope and his own. The aristocracy still held aloof, except on special occasions, and only a few of its choicer spirits swelled the enthusiastic band of his real admirers, which, besides a substantial following of "pittites," included almost all the literary and artistic luminaries of the age, both in England and France.

To summarize, his innovations were: a genuinely picturesque and scholarly setting; thorough rehearsals for a unified effect; rigid measures to improve the social conditions in the theatre; the restoration of Shakespeare's own texts; and above all, a resolute determination to make the legitimate drama worthy of its mission to a great nation. To this end he permitted to appear on his stage nothing vile, nothing slovenly, and nothing which had not been perfected by study and by laborious preparation for an harmonious effect of text, scenery, and action.

The praise given to Macready by his devoted friend and critic, Forster, is familiar, and it is perhaps more to the point now to cite the humbler opinion of the Theatrical Observer, who, since 1821, had followed every performance on the legitimate stage with an earnest hope for the coming of a dramatic millennium. He more nearly, perhaps, represented the feelings of the people. Of the superb revival of *Macbeth*, he wrote:[1]

> Mr. Macready has nobly redeemed his promise of producing the legitimate drama in a style worthy of the works of our

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[1] No. 4957, Nov. 7, 1837.

great dramatists, and we only wish the public had been more liberal in their patronage. He, last night, produced Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, cast with all the available strength of the company, and with such an attention to the mechanical business of the scene, that we may fearlessly assert that this fine tragedy was never so well represented, as a whole, before.

No truer appraisal of Macready's work is to be found than his own modest estimate made at the testimonial banquet tendered him by his followers at the conclusion of the Covent Garden period: "I have only endeavored," he said in his speech, "to 'piece out some of the imperfections,' as they appeared to me, of our theatrical system."

Although this brief sentence states fairly the limits of his work, it by no means represents the quality of his service to the drama. At a period of its greatest shame and distress, he had raised the stage out of the mire, and he had given to it a prosperity — although not satisfying — that was greater perhaps than any it had enjoyed since the days of Garrick. He had drawn to it the interest and support of serious workers in the realms of art and letters, and of the more worthy representatives of the state and society. In the Covent Garden speech he made the modest boast of "a season unequalled by any not having the attraction of a new performer, for the last sixteen years." He could have boasted that he had taken the first step toward restoring the dramatic art of England from its lowest decline to a place of respect and popularity among thoughtful men.

Chapter IX

PIONEERS OF REFORM IN MANAGEMENT: VESTRIS

AS Macready represents the first great advance upon the work of Kemble, so Madame Vestris made the first notable improvement over the work of Elliston for the "illegitimate" art. The names of Kemble, Elliston, and Macready are now remembered because of their association with the master-works of our literature, but Eliza Lucy Bartolozzi Vestris's name — not so related — is known to scarcely any who have not devoted themselves strictly to the annals of the stage or to those of scandal, in both of which spheres she enjoyed an almost unrivalled notoriety.[1] Her artistry came by nature as well as circumstance, for she was the daughter of Bartolozzi, the engraver. She was born in London in 1797. Possessing extraordinary charm of voice and person, she showed, at a very early age, a great aptitude for music and language. By her youthful marriage, in 1813, to M. Armand Vestris, the great European master of ballet, she became by profession a *danseuse*, but her chief gift was her rich contralto voice, which won her a foremost place in the Italian opera.

Her first London appearance in opera in 1815 caused a sensation, and for a considerable time she was a chief attraction. *The Inquisitor* in reporting her début described her voice as "a perfect contralto, possessing a peculiar sweetness," and her countenance, as "expressive rather of modest loveliness than of any very marked passion." It spoke, too, of "a chasteness in her acting which seldom fails to please," and added, "We scarcely ever remember to have seen so much ease and simplicity evinced on a first appearance."

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[1] See *Madame Vestris and Her Times*, by Charles E. Pearce, Brentano's, 1923, for a recent attempt to revive her fame. The present chapter was written before this work appeared.

After her separation from Vestris in 1819, — due in part to his brutal and mercenary nature, and in part, no doubt, to her own lapses from conjugal fidelity, — she entered the theatrical world as a member of Elliston's operatic corps at Drury Lane. She was not long in coming to the front of her department. Moncrieff's *Don Giovanni in London*, a light burlesque, gave her the first great opportunity. "Breeches parts" had been favorites with the public since, at least, the days of Mrs. Jordan, but never had the spirit of the "leading boy" been so bewitchingly embodied as by the sprightly, graceful Vestris. All London was at her feet. It was another instance of the way in which the history of the drama, perhaps more than the annals of other human activity, repeats itself. The triumph of Vestris as Don Giovanni anticipated by thirty years the similar triumph of Miss Wilton as Pippo, a revelation of art which found even Dickens without sufficient powers of praise, and which, like the earlier appearance of Vestris, was fraught with deep significance for the future of the stage. For ten years Vestris delighted London at the major theatres as singer, dancer, and actress, and like many others in such positions, won for herself great theatrical popularity and still more scandal. The latter fame has outlived her; the former has, I believe, never been given the credit it deserves, not even in Mr. Pearce's recent sympathetic life.

Of her work as an actress we shall speak later. Her achievements as manageress, which are more important, are enough to occupy our attention for the present. Like many more of the dramatic profession, she found herself the victim of the monopoly, the results of which became acute after the failure of Elliston in 1826. Bandied about without any certain means of support, she finally, in 1830, conceived the bold idea of managing a theatre for herself — at the time an unheard-of presumption in a woman. For her purpose the majors, where hitherto she had been seen, were out of the question. She therefore conceived the plan, which, because of such associations, was all the more daring, of erecting a minor establishment to the dignity of legitimate art. This she meant to do, not by violating the monopoly restrictions, but in full compliance with them. In this respect her conception and her accomplishment had nothing in common with Elliston's endeavors. She seems to have been the first to realize that in the drama as in all else pertaining to the mind, it is not so much the law as the spirit which determines accomplishment. Suddenly the little Pavilion in Wych Street, that since the departure of Elliston had failed under at least four managers, was touched, as it were, by a fairy's wand, and from a scrap-heap of theatricalities was transformed into a palace of fairyland. Its audiences were by the same touch raised from cockneydom to aristocracy. Furthermore, by this same stroke, a legion of subtle spirits were released to work greater wonders in the realm of dramatic art. The fairy was Vestris, and her wand the pen of Planché.

If we assume the critical attitude of our own times in approaching her work, it will fail to stir us. We shall see in it merely a somewhat higher type of burlesque — and, for that reason, perhaps less pleasing — than entertainments of a similar class which abound to-day at the expense of the finer things in the drama. Her *Orpheus in the Underworld*, to be sure, became at His Majesty's in 1911, *Orpheus in the Underground*.[1] That and similar pantomimes are the only direct inheritance we can trace to this surprising ancestress of the modern stage.

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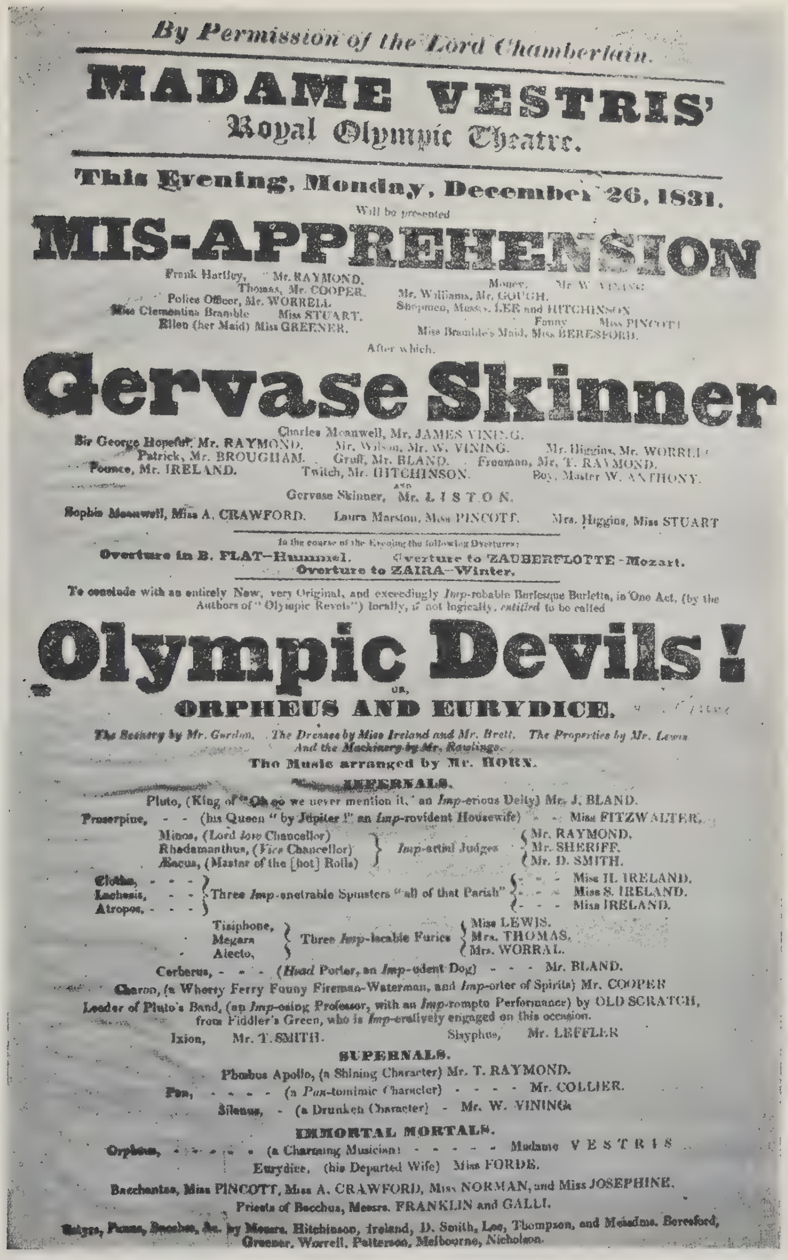
[1] Produced by Mr. Tree, in an adaption from the Planché-Vestris original, as a Christmas Pantomime, in 1911, at His Majesty's Theatre.

Viewed, however, as I believe she should be, in the light of her own day, and in relation to the inherited and conventional drama, she assumes a very different importance. Let us note, however, that here again we have to do with that vital thing, the stage, and not with the closet. On the stage her influence spread to every form of representation. Its peculiar history we shall now attempt to trace.

She brought to her management of the Olympic all the advantage of a popular idol, whose fascination, unhappily, was the greater because it was not unsullied. It does not appear, however, that on the stage she exercised this fascination in an unworthy manner. Extravagance, self-indulgence, and moral turpitude were strangely mixed in her nature with an exquisite sense of refinement, a genuine love of art, and a bold spirit of high endeavor: the latter qualities, so far as the stage is concerned, were destined to predominate, although they could not save her from an unhappy life and a wretched grave. Her seven pairs of gloves in an evening, her imposing *entourage*, and her gay suppers, may have dragged her and her equally susceptible husband, Mathews, into an endless fight with creditors, but they seem never to have interfered with the diligent, efficient, and high-minded management of her theatres. We might wish that her faculties had been directed by a mentality as sane and normal as it was brilliant and indomitable.

Her career at the Olympic was not to begin without a protest from the majors, but she at last secured a license for "burlettas" and opened her engagement on January 3, 1831, with the *Olympic Revels* by Dance and Planché. Thus began most unpretentiously a revolution in stage art more considerable and far-reaching than anything attempted by Kemble, Kean, or Macready. Its importance has now been lost sight of, in spite of the universal adoption of its innovations. We have forgotten Vestris just as we have forgotten the originators of chairs, beds, and cookery.



By Permission of the Lord Chamberlain.

MADAME VESTRIS'

Royal Olympic Theatre.

This Evening, Monday, December 26, 1831,

Will be presented

MIS-APPREHENSION

Frank Hartley, Mr. RAYMOND.
Thomas, Mr. COOPER.
Police Officer, Mr. WORRELL
Miss Clementina Bramble Miss STUART.
Ellen (her Maid) Miss GREENER.
Money, Mr W. VINING.
Mr. Williams, Mr. GOUGH.
Shopmen, Messrs. LEE and HITCHINSON
Fanny Miss PINCOTT
Miss Bramble's Maid, Miss BERESFORD.

After which,

Gervase Skinner

Charles Meanwell, Mr. JAMES VINING.
Sir George Hopeful, Mr. RAYMOND.
Mr. Wilson, Mr. W. VINING.
Mr. Higgins, Mr. WORRELL
Patrick, Mr. BROUGHAM.
Gruff, Mr. BLAND.
Freeman, Mr. T. RAYMOND.
Pounce, Mr. IRELAND.
Twitch, Mr. HITCHINSON.
Boy, Master W. ANTHONY.
AND
Gervase Skinner, Mr. LISTON.
Sophia Meanwell, Miss A. CRAWFORD.
Laura Marston, Miss PINCOTT.
Mrs. Higgins, Miss STUART

In the course of the Evening the following Overtures:
Overture in B. FLAT—Hummel. **Overture to ZAUBERFLOTTE—Mozart.**
Overture to ZAIRA—Winter.

To conclude with an entirely New, very Original, and exceedingly *Imp*-robable Burlesque Burletta, in One Act, (by the Authors of "Olympic Revels") locally, if not logically, *entitled* to be called

Olympic Devils!

OR,

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE.

The Scenery by Mr. Gordon. The Dresses by Miss Ireland and Mr. Brett. The Properties by Mr. Lewis. And the Machinery by Mr. Rawlings.

The Music arranged by Mr. HORN.

INFERNALS.

Pluto, (King of "Oh no we never mention it," an *Imp*-erious Deity) Mr. J. BLAND.
Proserpine, - - (his Queen "by Jupiter!" an *Imp*-rovident Housewife) - - Miss FITZWALTER.
Minos, (Lord *low* Chancellor) } *Imp*-artial Judges { Mr. RAYMOND.
Rhadamanthus, (*Vice* Chancellor) } *Imp*-artial Judges { Mr. SHERIFF.
Æacus, (Master of the [hot] Rolls) } *Imp*-artial Judges { Mr. D. SMITH.
Clotho, - - - } Three *Imp*-enetrable Spinsters "all of that Parish" { - - - Miss H. IRELAND.
Lachesis, - - } Three *Imp*-enetrable Spinsters "all of that Parish" { - - - Miss S. IRELAND.
Atropos, - - - } Three *Imp*-enetrable Spinsters "all of that Parish" { - - - Miss IRELAND.
Tisiphone, } Three *Imp*-lacable Furies { Miss LEWIS.
Megara } Three *Imp*-lacable Furies { Mrs. THOMAS.
Alecto, } Three *Imp*-lacable Furies { Mrs. WORRAL.
Cerberus, - - - (*Head* Porter, an *Imp*-udent Dog) - - - Mr. BLAND.
Charon, (a Wherry Ferry Funny Fireman-Waterman, and *Imp*-orter of Spirits) Mr. COOPER
Leader of Pluto's Band, (an *Imp*-osing Professor, with an *Imp*-romptu Performance) by OLD SCRATCH, from Fiddler's Green, who is *Imp*-eratively engaged on this occasion.
Ixion, Mr. T. SMITH. Sisyphus, Mr. LEFFLER

SUPERNALS.

Phœbus Apollo, (a Shining Character) Mr. T. RAYMOND.
Pan, - - - - (a *Pan*-tomimic Character) - - - - Mr. COLLIER.
Silenus, - (a Drunken Character) - Mr. W. VINING.

IMMORTAL MORTALS.

Orpheus, - - - - - (a Charming Musician) - - - - - Madame VESTRIS.
Eurydice, (his Departed Wife) Miss FORDE.
Bacchantes, Miss PINCOTT, Miss A. CRAWFORD, Miss NORMAN, and Miss JOSEPHINE.
Priests of Bacchus, Messrs. FRANKLIN and GALLI.
Satyrs, Fauns, Bacchae, &c. by Messrs. Hitchinson, Ireland, D. Smith, Lee, Thompson, and Mesdms. Beresford, Greener, Worrell, Patterson, Melbourne, Nicholson.

Bill of the First Performance of "Olympic Devils," Dec. 26, 1831
Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library

Her house and management were the first in London to approximate the conditions of the contemporary theatre. She did not, however, pose as a reformer. There was nothing in her opening address to the public to indicate more than a personal attempt to win their approval:

> Nobles and gentle matrons, patrons, friends,
> Before you here a 'vent'rous woman bends —
> A warrior woman, who in strife embarks,
> The first of all dramatic Joan-of-Arcs!
> Cheer on the enterprise thus dared by me,
> The first that ever led a company;
> What though until this very hour and age,
> A lessee lady never owned a stage —
> I 'm that *Belle Sauvage* — only rather quieter —
> Like Mrs. Nelson, turn'd a stage proprietor.[1]

The little theatre was tastefully decorated, and provided with every comfort then conceivable. The fashionable world, repelled by the vulgarity of the larger houses, found itself perfectly at home in this little establishment, where the delicacy of its unpretentious art was enhanced by the coziness and beauty of the house itself.

Planché, who perhaps labored with Vestris most sympathetically and for the longest time, among those who wrote for her stage, gives us her golden rules: no "orders," no puffing, perfect staging, speedy withdrawal of failures, and early closing.[2] A contemporary writer described her little establishment as "a confectioner's shop, where, although one cannot absolutely make a dinner, one may enjoy a most agreeable refection, consisting of jellies, cheese-cakes, custards, and such trifles 'light as air,' served upon the best Dresden China in the most elegant style." [3] Planché, in making this quotation, adds significantly that, if the law had not refused her the right, she would have "served the entire meal" — as, indeed, in her later managements, she attempted to do.

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, no. 2827, Jan. 6, 1831. It is also here noted that women in the provinces had previously managed theatres. Mrs. Baker, at Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone, Rochester, and Canterbury, was among the most conspicuous. See also Baker, p. 258.

[2] Letter to Vestris, in appendix to his collected Extravaganzas, p. 286.

[3] Quoted by Planché from the *New Monthly Magazine*, Oct., 1836.

Almost all the old managerial practices were either reversed or modified. By accident, Planché tells us, she hit upon the idea of shortening her program. Her first entertainment was greatly reduced in length because at the last minute she was obliged to withdraw one of the pieces she had advertised. The curtain fell at eleven o'clock, and everyone seemed well pleased. She thereafter made this her regular practice, and gradually, no doubt, the other London theatres followed suit. When we recall that, not infrequently, twelve o'clock and even later was the closing time and half-past six the time to begin, we may appreciate the relief that even this amenity brought to the theatrical world. She was thus able to reduce the size of her company, and she economized further by specializing in farce, burlesque, and light opera, in all of which music played an important part. Since she had to engage only a few actors, she could choose the best. The *Era*[1] declared that her success was chiefly due to the fact that "her pieces contain but three or four parts altogether, and she has always had an equal number of good performers to sustain them."

As her management came before Macready's, she was able to anticipate in her unpretentious way his careful drill for a unified effect in acting. Her company was thoroughly in sympathy with her aims, and all worked together for the effects she desired to produce. The result was an experience wholly new to London audiences. While she was off stage, Planché tells us, she would often watch her company from a box, making corrections in the most minute details.

It has troubled Filon and other commentators to explain why, with a management like hers in 1831, the arrival of a genuine comedy of manners should have been delayed until 1865. Many answers might be made. The all-sufficient one at this time, however, was that the law made it utterly impossible. As it was, Vestris barely escaped suppression by the patentees. Probably more than any other, she was feared and watched by the jealous guardians of the "legitimate."

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[1] Sept. 30, 1838.

Nevertheless, the steps which the law forced her to take, even in the apparently wrong direction, carried her far in advance of anything in realistic comedy the contemporary stage had seen. Prevented from staging the legitimate, she determined to elevate the "illegitimate" forms — especially those of farce and burlesque — to a plane of artistic excellence unsurpassed in the memories of her oldest patrons. As, later, Miss Wilton found Robertson, imbued with a kindred spirit, awaiting her call, so now Vestris had at her command the facile pen of J. R. Planché, who, like herself, was born of a new dramatic spirit. Baker perhaps justly declares that he "had a delicacy of touch in burlesque that has never been equalled by any other writer."[1] Surely no management and no company of actors on the English stage since, at least, the days of Fielding, had ever brought to the art of burlesque such a wealth of idea and of histrionic skill as the little Olympic company under Madame Vestris.

Let us examine her accomplishment more specifically. For the first time during the century, a small company of actors had devoted themselves to the single object of producing in the most tasteful and artistic manner possible, and with attention to the most minute details, as well as to harmony of effect, a series of light plays — chiefly burlesques — that made no mean pretentions to literary merit. Here, then, were the first two characteristics of present-day management — small companies and specialization. But this was not all. For the first time in the century

[1] Baker, p. 259.

there was made on her stage an attempt, in costumes, scenery, and acting, to reproduce the appearance and manners of contemporary life. As Miss Wilton did thirty years later, Vestris gathered together in her company a group of kindred spirits, who, if somewhat less conscious of their pioneering, were none the less devoted to her principles of management. These were, at various times, Liston, Keeley, Bland, James Vining, Charles Mathews, Jr., Frank Mathews, Mrs. Orger, and Miss Goward (later Mrs. Keeley). Madame Vestris herself never posed unduly as reformer or martyr. She frankly courted and won popularity, although in doing so she did not neglect her larger opportunities. She chose to serve the art that served her. It was her conscious aim to place before her audience, even in burlesque, a reflection of their own life and thoughts. The only approach to this method had previously been made in melodramas of the Newgate Calendar type with a purely sensational purpose. Vestris introduced realism with a very different aim. Where previously the gross and sensational had been stressed, she magnified the absurd and the ironical. Others had dealt with the dingily real; she never abandoned respectability. Even her shepherdesses carried golden crooks and her milkmaids wore silk slippers. Her realism then, although not in the least true to type and actuality, was insistent upon fidelity to normal human appearance and behavior. First of all, she banished grotesqueness in costume and acting. This in itself was no small reform. She and her author agreed that the finest comic effect did not result from outrageous dressing and silly behavior, but from a contrast between personages who behaved like people in real life, and the absurdities they were given to say. Such, very consciously, she made the first step in her stage reform. While she made her popularity secure, she very substantially improved her art.

The début of Charles Mathews, Jr., was not the least of the significant facts of the Olympic management. It occurred December 7, 1835. As the son of Charles Mathews, famed for his "At Homes,"[1] in which realistic character sketches had been the novelty, the younger Mathews, abandoning law for the stage, had evidently determined to go further than his illustrious parent. So sensational a first appearance would no doubt have been welcomed by any manager in London. For this reason, Mathews's choice of the little Olympic Theatre is of peculiar significance. He thus explained his motives:

"The lighter phase of comedy, representing the more natural and less labored school of modern life, and holding the mirror up to nature without regard for the conventionalities of the theatre, was the aim I had in view. The Olympic was the only house where this could be achieved, and to the Olympic I at once attached myself."[2]

What Vestris had already done for the stage is indicated sufficiently by the following observation from the same source: "Drawing-rooms were fitted up like drawing-rooms, and furnished with care and taste, two chairs no longer indicated that two persons were to be seated."

Thus modern stage methods, and realism in a sense closely approaching its later signification, first appeared on the English stage of the nineteenth century. In 1838 the Olympic engagement ended. Mathews and Vestris were married, and attempted, by an American tour, to recoup their fortunes, depleted because of extravagance and dissipation. In her farewell speech Vestris frankly and, it appears, honestly boasted as follows:

> Eight seasons of continued success, unexampled, I really believe, in theatrical annals, major or minor, have stamped with the indelible mark of public approbation the system I had the honor to introduce in this theatre. That system was to set before you in the best possible manner, and as far as the Lord Chamberlain's license would admit of, the best entertainment

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[1] See pp. 324 f.

[2] *Autobiography.*

I could procure, to realize the illusion of the scene, by unflinching outlay upon proper costume, and careful attention to the decorations of the stage. Your constant attendance has shown that efforts, however humble, to elevate the dramatic art, are not wasted upon the British public, and liberality has proved the best economy.[1]

Although there was here but a modest beginning, the conventionality of the stage, so far as Vestris was concerned, had been effectually laid aside. The snub nose of the chambermaid, and the eyeglass with a pink ribbon attached, no longer were symbols of comedy. Although this effort was but a disappointing anticipation of the Robertsonian school, — which, had the law permitted, it might more nearly have paralleled, — nevertheless, it was an innovation and a reform of the first importance to the progress of stagecraft. The essential in stage realism, as Mr. Granville Barker and others have insisted, is the breaking-down of dramatic conventions. This work was abundantly accomplished by Vestris and Mathews. They appeared to be the first during the century to make the distinction between what is vital in drama, and what is merely traditional and conventional. To them, too, is due the credit of making this distinction apparent on their stage at the Olympic.

With the Olympic, however, and the failure in America, their activities had only begun. To the surprise of the London theatrical world, they had the boldness upon their return to take the Covent Garden Theatre which Macready had just renounced. Here, from 1839 to 1842, like their predecessors they bravely contended with misfortune, hoping, with the aid of the monopoly, to effect the reforms in full which in 1835 they had accomplished only in part. Although students of the drama turn to *London Assurance*, by Boucicault, as one of the first hopeful signs of better things for the English theatre, they are likely to overlook the fact that Vestris was its sponsor before the public, and that through her it gained its real significance in the progress of English drama.

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, no. 5133, June 1, 1838.

Vastly more alive to the vital needs of the drama than Macready, she sought to bring her monopoly stage into line with what has later been adequately proved to be the dramatic destiny of the nineteenth century. This effort of hers was hardly less hampered by untoward conditions than the Olympic management had been. Freedom as to the type to be presented was more than offset by the disadvantages of the big auditorium and the expense imposed by majordom. The vastness of Covent Garden was almost fatal to the finer effects of her new mode of representation. Besides encountering these difficulties at even a greater disadvantage than Macready, she had also to face the charge of desecrating the monopoly houses with her burlesque art, where now, critics declared, it would be given full sway, whereas before it had paraded more modestly in the afterpieces of the Elliston bills.

Let her do her best, as I believe she did, there was no possibility, with such handicaps, of a success such as, later, the Bancrofts achieved. But even more strikingly than at the Olympic, the work of Vestris and Mathews and their author Boucicault, at Covent Garden, resembled both in ideals and actual accomplishment the achievement of these later and more successful reformers.

The aimlessness of their author Boucicault indicated how unfavorable the times were for reform. Unlike Robertson, who twenty years later attempted to write a new English comedy, Boucicault found little or nothing at hand with which to build. He knew the drama only on its artificial side, and wrote out of a surprisingly broad acquaintance, as Filon has noted, with both the French and English traditional stage. Of life itself, he seems at this early period to have known little. There had been no preceding study on his part, as in the case of Robertson, of new stage conditions, and, unlike Robertson, he had only in a measure been awakened to the need of a new and vital representation of contemporary life. His first achievement — and so far as the written drama is concerned, perhaps his most important — was a patchwork, made possible on the stage by Madame Vestris's thorough revision. The young Lee Moreton, as he called himself,[1] had infused into a story by Brougham[2] a fresh comedy spirit. He set it all off by an abundance of stage tricks gleaned from his wide reading, and a brilliant dialogue that flowed abundantly from his Irish wit. Thus *London Assurance* came into existence, and the author Boucicault made his first, and perhaps most lasting, bid for fame. As a play, it was far more in line with the old comedy than the new. Its freshest stage trick was as old, at least, as Sheridan's oldest. Aside from a contemporary tone and a more modern economy of structure and dialogue that gave it an air of novelty, there was little about the new play to merit consideration as revolutionary drama. So little vitality was there in the form, that Boucicault in this single performance seemed to have overshot himself; for he never again attained to the same success with a similar type of play. It is this strange anomaly that has most puzzled Boucicault's commentators. Why should this play have been considered revolutionary, when now it seems that little or nothing about it was even new? Why did it lead to nothing? Why did even its own author, who for the next thirty years was the most prominent dramatist in the English-speaking world, write nothing more like it with appreciable success?

The answers to these questions are to be found in the relation of the work to its mode of representation. The effect of the first production in London, March 4, 1841, was more Vestris's than Boucicault's. What she had already done for burlesque at the Olympic, she now did with vastly more thoroughness in the interests of genuine comedy. Although the first and only important result of her endeavors was not a supremely great work of literature, it was nevertheless a great omen. Its merits were more considerable than those of any other work of the century before the Robertson comedy, but its significance lay not so much in the writing as in the presentation. Madame Vestris had required of her author a "modern comedy." What he had produced, although novel, was not modern. Its chief merit was that it lent itself perfectly to the Vestris methods of staging. Aside from its wit and its compact and easy structure, the setting and the interpretation [1] were all that conveyed the impression of innovation and electrified the audiences that crowded to see it. The debt which Boucicault owed to Vestris and Mathews, he himself gladly admitted. Of Mathews he wrote: "Passages which I never intended as hits were loaded, primed, and pointed, with an effect as unexpected to me as it was pleasing"; and of Vestris: "I am aware that to her judgment, taste, and valuable suggestion, with regard to alterations of character, situation, and dialogue, expunging passages, and dilating others — to her indefatigable zeal I owe my success." [2] This was the frank and generous acknowledgment of a young author. The truth of his statement was borne out by the fact that for twenty years no other original success of the same magnitude rewarded his labors.

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[1] It was the name under which he appeared at Miss Kelley's Soho Theatre. *A Lover by Proxy* was Boucicault's first play to be used by Vestris and Mathews. It was accepted because it was thought to be written by Maddison Morton. [2] See letter by Webster, *The Bancrofts*, p. 161.

Viewed, then, in the light of preceding and subsequent progress, the production of *London Assurance* by Vestris and Mathews at Covent Garden, in 1841, marked the high tide of realism during the days of the monopoly. It is a highly significant fact that not Macready, or Webster, or Bunn, or even Elliston achieved this success, but Vestris and Mathews, fresh from their years of experimentation at the little Olympic Theatre.

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[1] See pp. 274 and 339 ff.

[2] Preface to the first edition of *London Assurance* (1841).

Vestris's attitude toward authors in general was most commendable, and the care she bestowed upon the staging of a contemporary play was far more painstaking than Macready's had been for a play by no less a personage than Browning. The veteran Knowles, whose *Love*, *The Bride of Messina*, and *Old Maids* were written for her, enthusiastically declared:

"I owe it to Mr. and Mrs. Mathews to acknowledge that, besides having granted me the highest terms I ever yet received for a play, they have displayed the most unstinted liberality in preparing my drama for representation."[1]

That Vestris and Mathews were worthy of the monopoly privileges, even in the eyes of their contemporaries, they amply proved in their treatment of the legitimate repertory. Unfitted both by temperament and training for success in poetical comedy, Vestris was ambitious to contribute her share toward the Shakespearean revival inaugurated by Macready. Her friendship and coöperation with Planché, the author of *British Costume*, was invaluable to her in this new enterprise. Her first attempt was *Love's Labor's Lost*. Although it was superbly managed, it was hardly calculated to make a great success with audiences acquainted with the greater works of the master. As might be expected, she next turned to the surer and more congenial field of the eighteenth century. At her hands *The School for Scandal* and *The Rivals* received the best pictorial setting that had been given them up to date. She had not, however, abandoned Shakespeare. Since her fame at the Olympic had chiefly rested upon the production of fairyland burlesques, naturally she undertook *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.[2]

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[1] Preface to the first edition of *Love* (1839).

[2] Given Nov. 6, 1840.

She was by some contemporaries accused of "profaning the temple of the legitimate." It is, therefore, only fair to her that we should record fully the remarkable success of this production.

What the *Observer* had to say was especially significant, because when the play was produced by Bunn a few years previously, he had remarked: "The *Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of Shakespeare's plays that we never wish to see performed; when acted, it is converted from a delightful fiction into an incongruous, improbable drama, and in its present state of tarnished stage appointments it is not even attractive as a spectacle." [1] But in reviewing Vestris's revival, his tone was changed: "The tasteful and gorgeous splendor, with which this delightful piece has been produced, and the beautiful music . . . must insure a long career of success. . . . We have magnificent spectacle from which, at intervals, the most exquisite poetry ventures to peep." [2]

But we have evidence to the same effect from a much more significant source, Mr. J. O. Halliwell, who came boldly to her defence in a pamphlet against the old-school critics who accused her of contempt for the monopoly. He declared, probably with truth, that the Vestris-Planché revival of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* was the first really successful performance of the play of which we have any knowledge. "I am confident," he added, "[their efforts] will in after years form a very important epoch in the theatrical history of England." [3]

We have now, I think, reviewed enough of the work accomplished by these remarkable servants of the drama, to warrant the prominent place I have given to their management of Covent Garden. The spirit of their work for the legitimate drama was fairly reflected in a modest speech at the end of the first season. Vestris said: "We have endeavored, in the representation of plays, to look to the production of an harmonious picture, rather than to prominence of an individual character"; and then, quite unlike Macready, she urged her audience to attend the playhouses even if the greatest actors and actresses were no longer to be seen, because, she believed, actors were "made as well as born," and the theatres were the proper "schools of their making." [1]

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, no. 3847, April 17, 1834.

[2] *Ibid.*, no. 5899, Nov. 16, 1840.

[3] Letter entitled, "The Management of Covent Garden Vindicated," London, 1843.

What their appreciative contemporaries thought of the Covent Garden engagement is well voiced in the following article from the *Morning Post*, following their relinquishment of Covent Garden in 1842. So far as I have been able to confirm its assertions, it is a fair presentation of the very real service to the drama performed by these extraordinary workers.

> What has Mme. Vestris done for the English stage? [asks the writer. He answers:] She has banished vulgarity, coarse manners, *double entendre*, and impertinence from the boards over which she presided, and, in their place, has evoked the benefits that flow from a dramatic representation of polished manners, refinement, and politeness. Her green-room was the resort of the learned, witty, and the wise, a miniature picture of polite and well-bred society, whence a wholesome example spread itself on all within its influence. Once communicated to the stage, it became communicable to the public, and sure we are that a desirable tone of refinement, both in manner and conversation, has been extensively spread in private life by the lady-like deportment and acting of Mme. Vestris. To art she gave an impulse of no mean importance. Witness the magnificent scenery, as appropriate as it was beautiful, which her fine taste caused continually to be brought before the public. The *mise-en-scène* was never perfect or in good keeping until Mme. Vestris taught her painters how to execute, and the public how to appreciate, her own pictorial conceptions.[2]

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, no. 5793, May 30, 1840.

[2] Quoted from the *Morning Post* in *Theat. Obs.*, no. 6348, April 29, 1842.

In spite of this remarkable achievement it is said that Mathews and Vestris were ejected and sued by the proprietors for a shortage amounting in four years to only £600.[1] Surely the house was never again to prove so profitable to its owners or so serviceable to dramatic art.

Not easily discouraged, Vestris and Mathews, after a few years devoted to financial recovery, made a last venture. If their career is interesting for no other reason, it is exceedingly valuable for the light it throws upon the monopoly, and its far-reaching influence. The monopoly war drove Vestris from the major houses in the eighteen-twenties by making them unremunerative. During the eighteen-thirties, in order to appear at all, she was obliged to submit to the chamberlain's ruling, which permitted her to perform "burlettas" only. In her effort to escape these galling restrictions, she courted certain ruin at the large house in Covent Garden. When, however, the cloud of the monopoly had been lifted, she was among the first to make notable use of the new privileges. Surely no type of management then in existence could have profited more from theatrical freedom. Her engagement at the Lyceum, beginning in 1847, was inevitable. It was the last fight to produce what monopoly conditions had rendered all but impossible.

When we consider that as early as 1826 Vestris was generally thought to be somewhat on the decline in personal attraction,[2] it is not surprising that her career at the Lyceum twenty years later did not mark a great epoch in theatrical affairs. She was then about fifty years of age, and, indeed, in that very year she had announced her determination to retire from the stage.[3] Mathews, however, was still at the height of his powers.

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[1] Baker, p. 145.

[2] Pückler-Muskau, in a *Tour of a German Prince*, iii, Letter V, speaks of her as *un peu passée*. The *Theat. Obs.*, no. 3504, March 9, 1833, speaks of her in the same manner.

[3] *Theat. Jour.*, Feb. 6, 1847.

As might be expected, too, a reputation built up, in their prime, for burlesque and farce, followed them now with increased momentum. The public would have nothing of a more serious nature from them. Thus the popular psychology confirmed the mischief wrought by the monopoly conditions; for the ghost of "illegitimacy" continued to haunt them for years after the patents had been buried. At the Lyceum, therefore, their productions consisted of farces, burlesques, and resplendent spectacles. Cost and pains were not spared to make these the finest and most ingenious pictures thus far seen upon the English stage. While their patrons praised them for their unfolding palm tree of jewels and other startlingly new effects,[1] the more earnest supporters of the stage complained that such trifles outweighed in the eyes of the management the claims of literary drama.

That even these light pieces were not wholly without merit G. H. Lewes, critic for the *Leader*, makes emphatically clear. Lewes was partial to the work of the Lyceum, but I believe not unduly so. Speaking of *The Good Woman in the Wood*, he declared:

> The Lyceum itself affords no standard of comparison. Never on the stage was there a scene of such enchantment and artistic beauty. . . . The fairies have had millions of worshippers, hundreds of poets, and one supreme artist, and that artist is William Beverley. Mme. Vestris, to whose taste the public owes so much (and cheerfully acknowledges the debt!) was in wonderful voice.

And this about a favorite who in 1826 was *un peu passée*. Even her house was of unparalleled charm. "We have never seen anything that will bear comparison to it," said a writer in the *Theatrical Journal*, "not even in the royal apartments."[2]

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[1] For the tree in the *Island of Jewels*, see *Theat. Jour.*, Feb. 6, 1850. See also *Ibid.*, Nov. 1, 1849, letter by "Legion."

[2] At the time of its opening in 1847.

So much for the more trivial aspects of the Lyceum period. Its deeper significance lay in another direction — the mirroring forth of the French stage. Both Vestris and Mathews were almost as familiar with the French theatre as with the English. Mathews later even acted — although with small success — in French on the stage of *Les Variétés*.[1]

We must be content with a hurried glance at the best of their work in reproducing the French art. Both in scenery and in acting, their realism at the Lyceum surpassed by a great deal anything previously attempted in English. How far Vestris and Mathews had progressed in stage realism, although perhaps of a meretricious sort, is well illustrated by the presentation of *A Chain of Events*, arranged in eight acts by G. H. Lewes from *Les Dames de la Halle*. In this, a ship with all hands on board was seen to toss in the waves, turn first one side and then the other to the audience, hit upon a rock, and then sink, leaving the victims struggling in the waves.[2]

A much finer effect was produced in *The Day of Reckoning* from *L'Enfant de Paris*. Although we shall have occasion later to cite this as an extraordinary specimen of the pre-Robertsonian school of acting, we may here remark that it was of an astonishingly realistic tone, surprising even Lewes, who was well acquainted with the already reputed realism of the Mathews school. It chanced very appropriately that Vestris's last appearance, in 1854, was made in Mme. de Girardin's exquisite little sketch, *La joie fait peur*, Englished as *Sunshine through the Clouds*.

As we have already remarked, her production of original English work was at this time inconsiderable. She seems never to have gone beyond the burlesque and farce types of Planché and his imitators. Of these, however, a goodly number of old stage favorites were to be counted, such as *The Pride of the Market*, *The Island of Jewels*, and *The Good Woman in the Wood*, and the farces, *Used Up*, *Box and Cox*, and *Cool as a Cucumber*. She availed herself of the free-theatre privilege, however, to produce standard English works as well as French plays. Her most noteworthy revivals were *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The School for Scandal*, and *The Critic*.

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[1] Sept. 11, 1863.

[2] For Macready's effect of a similar nature in *The Tempest*, see *Theat. Obs.*, no. 5248, Oct. 15, 1838.

The passing of Vestris from the stage in 1854 and the abandonment of the Lyceum in 1856 by her husband, who was shortly imprisoned for debt, brought the work of these unique and tragic figures in management to a close. Vestris died, but Mathews toured America in 1857 and returned, with more scandal and another wife, to prolong his career for more than twenty years of surprisingly sustained and brilliant acting. He enjoyed a large measure of popular favor to the end of his stage life in 1878. He prided himself on the criticism often passed on his work, that his art had remained unchanged, and that he acted every part as he had performed it twenty years before. Although in 1835 he had been regarded a revolutionary realist, he was in 1865 dubbed by the Robertsonians one of the foremost of reactionaries. Thus the art of the stage, quite apart from its literature, advances. The innovator of one generation is in the next passed by with an air of haughty contempt by those who have learned a new vantage-point from which to win applause.

Why, it is often asked, did the labors of these two eminent reformers, struggling at the forefront of stage fame for nearly thirty years, accomplish so much less than Robertson and the Bancrofts, who with similar ideals effected a dramatic revolution in the few years from 1865 to 1870? This question usually implies interest merely in the written drama. Let us, then, first approach the literary problem. What were Vestris's contributions to a newer drama? She made possible a tone of literary refinement in burlesque, raising that despised art to respectability and even beauty, and she was forced to work in this manner because the law required her to be "illegitimate" or a slave. In choosing independence with an artistic purpose, she took a first step toward a new drama. In her management of Covent Garden, where her opportunities were greater, she did her best to encourage the known writers of comedy. Furthermore, she felt the need of a fresh comedy of manners and tried to find an author to produce it. She labored with Knowles, paid him liberally, but was disappointed. She discovered Boucicault, recognizing in him a substance out of which a new drama might be created. Toward the end of the failing management at Covent Garden, she made a supreme effort to stage for him a revolutionary play: and the public hailed in *London Assurance* the beginning of a new comedy. But at best it was old comedy in new array. Between that time and the opening of the Lyceum management, Boucicault, finding it impossible to please his public indefinitely with comedies of the *London Assurance* type, had ventured upon a career of reckless experimentation. Perhaps this writer was no longer amenable, but it is more probable that she and her husband had abandoned the hope of finding an English playwright who could compete effectively with the French repertory. For their later successes they depended largely on translation. Their zeal as literary reformers had probably abated, and their efforts were devoted rather to the stage itself than to the drama. If they had professed at this time any literary creed, it perhaps would have been that English dramatists must first learn the French manner of composition before they could develop one of their own. Since, at any rate, the public seemed thoroughly to concur in this unformulated policy, their course was clearly determined.

They had never posed as extreme radicals, but chose a more genial course of reforming only so far as popular approval followed them. They never assumed wittingly the rôle of martyrs. They courted popularity and they won it. Since French art was found to fill their houses as well as native, and since the cost and danger of translation was not comparable to that of original composition, it is hardly surprising that these profligates, who had twice already escaped their creditors, should have chosen the easier and surer course. But even in this respect, the choice was not merely mercenary. They realized, I believe, that before better things could be hoped for in English drama, their new mode of realism must become established on the English stage. To this end they gave their best endeavors, and they were, perhaps, better able to bring the new art into favor by exhibiting plays of merit from France, than by venturing "originals" written by Englishmen who were half-hearted in their espousal of the new methods, or, like Boucicault, were merely experimenting. Perhaps they did not reason in this wise. Whatever their motives, through them, better than through any other pre-Robertsonian workers, the lighter moods of French art won popularity on the English stage. Let it not be forgotten that the eyes of Robertson himself watched this progress from the vantage-point of their prompter's box! Here was one of those easily forgettable little facts, hidden away in a mass of overshadowing circumstance, which explain better than volumes the progress of art, and especially the art of the stage.

It must be granted, furthermore, that Madame Vestris had grave personal limitations in the rôles of high comedy. Always competent and charming, she was not equally subtle or profound. Good taste and vivacity rather than inspiration and versatility were the secrets of her fascination. The same is perhaps true of Mathews, whose chief distinction was an almost unparalleled rapidity of bright, easy-going speech. In such personal virtuosity there was an insurmountable obstacle to the building up of a genuine modern comedy, in which not types but individuals play the distinguishing part.

It is useless to consider might-have-beens: but one is tempted to believe that, when these workers were still young and their ideals fresh, if only a free stage had been available, they would have done vastly more, not only for the spoken, but also for the written drama. Fragmentary and disappointing as their work proved to be, we cannot escape the conclusion that in their little theatre, the Olympic, in 1831, began the school of what we call modern comedy. Its distinguishing features, unlike those of the conventional type that preceded it, were: the observation and reflexion of contemporary life; the interpretation of that life in terms of itself; the representation of it by fitting costumes and scenes; and the enactment of it by a naturalistic, if not natural, imitation. In *London Assurance* they came nearest to bringing the written drama into accord with their principles, but the untoward conditions of monopoly and declining years prevented a continuance of such endeavors. Through the French art, however, they were able to make a refined, modern style of performance popular, thereby greatly hastening the preparation for a new type of dramatic composition. That they accomplished even this much, acting always in absolute compliance with the wishes of their public, is no small testimonial to their merit. Although they were sometimes familiar, and lapsed from a genuine illusion, they never were merely vulgar or coarse. To create a new species of comic art, to bring about a refinement of popular taste, to uplift not only the stage, but audiences as well, and, above all, to remove effectually the stigma of "illegitimate" from types of drama which were in the direct line of stage progress — to do even so much at a time darker for the English stage than almost any other, was, I believe, a service which we owe it to their memory to record. They had set themselves firmly but with good nature against a century-strong conventionalism; and although by a long life and indefatigable labor they did not succeed in turning its tide into a wholly new channel, they at least stemmed it, and held it in check, and did more than anyone else of their times, to prepare a new course for its pent-up energies. Incidentally they had given a clue to both Robertson and Boucicault as to the kind of stagecraft which in the future was to make these authors' fame. Even if Vestris's career was shadowed by perplexity and ended in sorrow and disgrace, — blamable in part to her personal weakness, — it remains, nevertheless, one of the most significant and interesting of the phenomena which we have to consider, and deserves no less prominence than I have here accorded to it. I believe Halliwell was right when he said that her management would in the future be regarded as an important epoch in the history of the English theatre.

Chapter X

CONSERVATISM AND TRANSITION: WEBSTER AND BUCKSTONE, PHELPS AND THE YOUNGER KEAN

WITH the passing of Macready as *le roi soleil* in the realms of poetic romance, the none too brilliant sun of the English stage appeared to set. At the end of his Drury Lane management in 1843, made the more sombre by the shadow of failure, there was but one hope for the standard-bearers of the "legitimate" — the freeing of the theatres. Even this hope was no longer as strong as it had been ten years before. The sphere of the minor houses had become so clearly defined that it appeared almost as difficult a task to train the public to consider them worthy of the poetic drama, as it had been to destroy the monopoly itself. Such is the strength of dramatic conservatism. The Haymarket was the only little house that the public had learned to take seriously.

In our review of the theatres we have already indicated how the Haymarket profited throughout the century by the decrepitude of the monopoly houses, owing to its privileged standing as the summer theatre. At the time of the monopoly's fall, the Haymarket had already become virtually a free theatre, for its summer privileges had been extended to a ten-months' season. Benjamin Webster was the first manager to enjoy these enlarged liberties. His fame as a comedian made it fitting that he should assume in 1837 the direction of the Haymarket, the celebrated home of comedy. Since, at this particular time, the circumstances of the major houses made financial success almost impossible, the advantages possessed by the Haymarket were enormous. There, and only there in all London, could the legitimate drama be given prosperously, and there, accordingly, we must look for preëminence in the older types of dramatic art. There, to use the common expression of the day, "the banners of the legitimate were kept flying." Webster freely opened his house as a place of refuge. Macready, when driven from the majors, and Mathews, Vestris, Farren, Mrs. Glover, and all the great company of the old-time celebrities, found protection and financial assistance at the Haymarket.

The public had the Haymarket habit, for at that theatre they found comparative comfort, intimacy, and, except vastness, all the paraphernalia of the art which they had come by long tradition to honor as "legitimate." This house also had the reputation of producing more original comedies than any other during our period. Here Jerrold received encouragement, and here, naturally, his best comedy, *Time Works Wonders*, was given a hearing. Here, too, Bulwer-Lytton's *Money*, produced in 1843, flung a challenge to the Vestris school, and showed that the conservatives had a modern tone about them. The Webster management adopted some of the Mathews-Vestris reforms, but never risked the excessive expenditure necessary to rival their realism or elegance; nor did it permit careful stage drill to interfere with the antics of the public's favorite comedians. Marston's *Strathmore*, which was staged by Webster, did much to encourage that diligent author of the "legitimate." Nowhere, in fact, was a writer more certain of a favorable reading than at the Haymarket. The object of the management, however, was not primarily to foster art, or to represent any school of acting whatsoever. It had won the popular favor largely because it presented to the public the funniest set of comedians to be found anywhere in London. Webster and Buckstone alone had irresistible attraction.

In 1853 Webster relinquished the management of the house in favor of the still more popular Buckstone — "Bucky," as he was affectionately known by the public. Even the Queen, as we have already remarked, came under his spell. Although the rising tide of stage improvement made itself felt more strongly under the Buckstone management than under that of Webster, the Haymarket remained to the end of our period rather the stronghold of reaction than of progress. Its aim was frankly to give comedy of the "good old English" type, in which Buckstone and Compton might appeal to an old-fashioned public in an old-fashioned way. Here Mathews took refuge after his second return from America. But by this time his "realism" had become conventional and stagy. Here Amy Sedgwick, long thought of as a realistic actress, made her fame. In general, Buckstone's art continued in the only vein that was sure to delight his public.

In spite, however, of Buckstone's reactionary tendencies, a considerable amount of advanced dramatic work found its way to his stage. Reade and Taylor's *Masks and Faces* was an early straw which indicated how strongly the newer tendencies had set in even among the conservatives. Still more noteworthy was Taylor's *American Cousin*, in which the new "character" type of acting, made notable by Sothern's performance of *Lord Dundreary*, shadowed forth the great importance this *genre* was to have in the shaping of the new comedy. Robertson himself was given in this theatre his first London success through the kind offices of Sothern, and his *David Garrick*, performed there in 1864 with no small satisfaction to all concerned, showed that the disparity between this stage and Robertson's was not as great as Robertson's followers insisted. With the company of this theatre in mind, Robertson fashioned the characters in *Society*. On the other hand, it was probably true that of the entire company only Sothern was thoroughly in sympathy with

Robertson and his school; but he, like Buckstone, Mathews, and the rest, was interested more in pleasing the public than in working reform. All alike preferred popularity to theories. Forty years of success had hardened Buckstone against any proposal that seemed to depend upon mere novelty. Herein lay his wisdom and his blindness. The stage is a debtor to his stubbornness, for because of it a wholly new band of workers were forced into partnership, and the most decided step during the century was made uncompromisingly in a new and right direction.

In all these years at the Haymarket there was nothing to fill the void left by Macready. Comedy might serve as a worthy substitute, but it could never fill the place of the old romantic and tragic drama that the upholders of the legitimate had feasted upon for the last time during the regal management of William Macready. Many, however, gradually came to find a secondary satisfaction in the astonishing management of Macready's faithful disciple, Samuel Phelps, beginning in 1844 at Sadler's Wells. His lesseeship was the first notable result of free theatres, and must surely be regarded as a phenomenon unrivalled on the English stage. Of a sudden this house, once a notorious resort for thieves, and more recently the home of the darkest and most watery of melodramas, was erected into a temple to the dramatic muse. Although this theatre was remote from London's theatrical centre, in surroundings anything but propitious, Phelps drew to it an art-loving and appreciative audience. No other theatre in London, except perhaps the Haymarket, enjoyed so long a period of unbroken prosperity. Those who despair of the drama's becoming the effective educational force that its friends believe it might be, should acquaint themselves with the history of Phelps's enterprise.[1] Many of the greatest plays in the English tongue were revived during the eighteen years of his management, to the unquestionable delight of the "uncouth denizens" of this almost suburban quarter. Probably never before or since has an English theatre so thoroughly performed its duty of educational leadership. Phelps produced in all thirty-four of Shakespeare's works, probably more than any one actor-manager ever attempted. Besides, he revived plays by Massinger, Webster, Beaumont and Fletcher, Macklin, Otway, Goldsmith, Sheridan, Milman, Sheil, Knowles, Talford, Hunt, Bulwer-Lytton, Browning, and Marston. Although his mission was frankly to acquaint this remote region with the old works they had scarcely before heard of, a number of new dramas were produced, and some, which have never since been given, achieved an immense popularity. One such was *John Saville of Haystead*, by the Reverend James White, which brought its author what then was the fabulous price of £400. Several other historical works by the same author were performed.

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[1] The recently announced project of the Duke of Devonshire to rehabilitate this ancient house and to reproduce the Phelps miracle in a social environment even less inviting, deserves universal attention from lovers of the drama.

Although Phelps at first resolved to comply with the melodramatic reputation of the theatre, expecting to do hardly more than improve the quality of the types presented,[1] he soon found that the thirst in that neighborhood for a better vintage was so great, that only twice, so far as I know, did he attempt modern melodramatic productions, and those were of no mean order, Boucicault's *Louis XI*, from the French of Delavigne, and Taylor's *The Fool's Revenge*, from Hugo's *Le Roi s'amuse*. Whatever his reasons, the old stock drama was his chief interest, and seemed thoroughly to satisfy his patrons. His following soon spread beyond the limits of his neighborhood, and included many visitors from all parts of the city. Not a few of his admirers considered him superior to both Charles Kean and Fechter, who held successively during his time the coveted first place upon the London stage.

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[1] See Archer's review in Ward's *Reign of Victoria*, ii, 575.

Viewed in its historical perspective Phelps's management made no distinct contribution to stagecraft. His revivals lacked the magnificence and scholarly exactness of Macready's and Charles Kean's mountings. He was in the main satisfied with the older schools of acting and management, and appears to have been, in the eyes of his contemporaries, the embodiment of all that was traditional and "respectable" in drama.

As an institution for social betterment, his stage was a marvellous proof of the power of great drama to appeal to the simple, everyday human understanding. Phelps's theatre was not so much an artistic influence as it was an example of justified optimism; not a school of art, but a pioneer in social betterment.

It must be admitted, however, that his venture seems to have fallen upon happy times, for never before or since, in spite of repeated attempts to emulate his example, has Sadler's Wells been what it was in the days of Mrs. Warner and Messrs. Greenwood and Phelps.

Naturally an engagement so successful as Phelps's long career in Islington made a more ambitious attempt to restore traditional English drama to its high estate inevitable. Once more all the forces of patriotism and conservatism in the drama united in a last determined effort to bring the great historical home of English drama, Drury Lane, back to its birthright; for no one could deny that its former glory had departed, and few were bold enough to pretend that anything surely better had made up for its loss. Here, after Macready's failure, Bunn continued his showdom, relieved, for a while, by a series of partly successful English operas. James Anderson, too, failed in an attempt to make it "The Grand National Opera House." At last, its case was so desperate that it was opened for a week at a time by numerous irresponsible and defaulting adventurers. In this condition it was taken over by another great showman of the Bunn tradition, E. T. Smith. For rental he paid only £3,500, or £6,500 less than had been demanded of poor Elliston from 1819 to 1827. Smith tried every possible attraction from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to G. V. Brooke's "physical" performances of Shakespeare, and even Italian opera. He reduced the price of the pit to one shilling. But all would not do: English opera, and even the popular favorites, Charles Mathews, Ben Webster, G. V. Brooke, Charles Kean, and Boucicault, failed to attract paying audiences. Falconer, famed for sensation, relieved Smith of his incubus in 1863, only to find it as heavy a burden on his own shoulders. In despair he took into partnership the notorious F. B. Chatterton, who generally, though I believe unjustly, has been given credit for sounding the knell of Byron and Shakespeare. From 1863 to 1868, at any rate, he committed no such outrage.

In 1863 Chatterton engaged Samuel Phelps, who a few years before had given up the responsibilities of Sadler's Wells, and, trusting to the popularity of that favorite, boldly ventured upon the old career of "legitimate" management at Drury Lane. It is to his credit, at least, that he succeeded for a long time in keeping upon this stage a higher type of dramatic representation than had been seen there since the days of William Macready. His company included at various times such celebrities as Creswick, Montgomery, Barry Sullivan, Helen Faucit, Mrs. Herman Vezin, and Adelaide Neilson. Fearlessly he put upon his stage, not only *Henry IV*, *Othello*, and *Cymbeline*, but also *Faust*, *Manfred*, and *Marino Faliero*. All these productions appear to have enjoyed no small success in spite of the maledictions of the newer school of critics and playgoers, like Robertson and Clement Scott, who saw nothing propitious in this desperate last stand to maintain "the banners of the legitimate." In the very year that

Robertson's *Society* was produced (1865–66), Old Drury was more prosperous than it had been since the days of Elliston and Edmund Kean. In this fact, if anywhere, proof was to be found that, financially speaking, the drama was entering upon a happier epoch. The rental of the old theatre rose to £6000, more than had been paid to its proprietors by anyone since 1835.

This last fight of the defenders of the old faith in their venerable stronghold was not so much an indication of the popularity of their art as it was a proof that better conditions had somehow been brought about. Although Chatterton's career had begun as a reaction against the "vulgar school," against the flood of sensation that had swept over the chief London stages, and against the inroads of translation from the French, it nevertheless failed to carry out all its good intentions. After 1866 the support of these who had generously rallied to the "banners of the legitimate" began to waver. Chatterton at last submitted to the inevitable. Old Drury was stormed and taken by the Goths and the Vandals.

The attack was sudden, and so formidable that all London was stirred by the excitement it created. On August 5, 1869, Chatterton put upon his stage the most morally unconventional play that had appeared during the century, Boucicault's *Formosa*. Boucicault pronounced it a deliberate "revolution of the English stage," by which he hoped to break "down the barrier which prejudice had established." "I have," he said, "proclaimed a literary thoroughfare, and I mean to keep it open." [1]

Chatterton was beset by wrathful protests. His reply to the assailants marks unmistakably the passing of the old dramatic régime. In a letter to the *Times* he declared that he had done everything in his power to revive the drama in both scenic and interpretative excellence.

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[1] Letter to the *Times*, reprinted in *Theat. Obs.* for Aug. 28, 1869.

> My enterprise [he said] was supported cheerfully by the pit and the gallery, but my boxes and stalls were sadly deserted. I lost money. Had not the pantomime and Christmas come to my rescue, I could not have stood my ground at all. I was stubborn and pursued this policy for pride's sake during six years. But, sir, I am neither a literary missionary nor a martyr: I am simply the manager of a theatre, a vender of intellectual entertainment to the London public and I found that *Shakespeare spelt ruin and Byron bankruptcy.*[1] In the extremity to which I was led by my faith in the fine taste of the upper classes for the poetic drama, I turned to the dramatist who has made the fortunes of more than one manager in London. I need not say with what result . . . the amount taken daily at my box-office before the doors open for securing stalls and private boxes alone to see *Formosa* exceeds the gross contents of my theatre to witness *Macbeth*. . . . I state the facts; I allow others to comment on them.

With our present perspective the comment is not difficult to supply. The old school of acting, which through the century had followed the destinies of the great theatres, — that of John Kemble, Mrs. Siddons, Edmund Kean, William Macready, and Samuel Phelps, — had now at last definitely failed to draw the public. Similarly the old school of authorship had lost its charm. In the meantime a wholly new type of dramatic representation as well as of authorship had won its way to a hearing, not only with the masses, but with the classes as well. This was at the same time crude and inspired. Under the obliterating claptrap and tinsel of the mountebank was the stirring of a new dramatic vitality.

It was an impressive coincidence that Old Drury should have been the scene of this last decisive action in the long-drawn-out tragedy of the legitimate drama. Not the least of the tragic ironies was the fact that the melodramatic art, which had first humbly found its way to the boards of this same "great major," in afterpieces like "Monk" Lewis's *Castle Spectre*, now finally and definitely triumphed there in Boucicault's *Formosa*, driving Byron and Shakespeare forever from their sanctuary. We now, at least, have the comfort of knowing that the significance attached to this downfall was entirely misplaced. Melodrama and not Shakespeare was, indeed, the style of histrionics best suited to the vast "legitimate" houses. That Drury Lane continues to-day to be the house *par excellence* for spectacular melodrama and pantomime is proof enough that the disheartening triumph of *Formosa* was not as significant as was then supposed. To the public of 1869, however, the event had all the charm of a bad omen.

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[1] The italics I use to indicate a phrase which at once became a boomerang in the battle between the old school and the new.

So much for the "legitimacy" of Macready and Phelps followed to its logical and tragic end. We have now to consider its foremost subverters, the younger Kean and Fechter.

The career of no actor during our period is so tinged with romance as that of Charles Kean, and hardly any is a better indication of the new current of life on the English stage. When merely a boy, he had the temerity to lay his tragic case before the public. In spite of the injunction of the great Edmund, his father, that he should not follow in his footsteps, the young Charles took advantage of his parent's infidelity to his mother, and made an appeal to the public. His début in 1827 created a great stir, far more than his merits as an actor warranted. A half-success sent him on a prosperous tour of the provinces. He returned to London at the high tide of Macready's fame. The sinking Bunn clutched at him as at the proverbial straw, and floated several seasons more, for with him he created a veritable sensation. Even Forster, Macready's devoted critic, was indulgent to him. But his success was a limited one. After many years in America, where he and his charming wife, Ellen Tree, gained wealth and celebrity, they arrived in London, just as Macready was on the point of retiring. The place of foremost tragedian stood invitingly open. A still more distinguished opportunity awaited them. While Macready was away from London, in 1848, the Queen turned to the younger actor in the attempt we have already noted to extricate herself from the awkward position resulting from the Drury Lane riots. Upon Kean, perhaps because there was no one else at hand, she heaped her regal favors, making him master of the revels.

Thus auspiciously Charles Kean began his management of the Princess's Theatre in 1850. We have hardly a more significant event to record. In the first place, it marked the triumph of the small theatre in replacing the monopoly houses. But it is more important because it marked also a compromise, made with all the appurtenances of legitimate art, between the old school of Macreadyism and the new school of Vestris, Boucicault, and their followers. Had Charles Kean been as great an actor as his father, no doubt his ambition and his tireless persistence would have made the period at the Princess's from 1850 to 1859 one of the greatest, as surely it was one of the most brilliant, in our period. As a manager, devoted to the highest interests of his art and bent upon the perfecting of stage illusion, we find no one to compare with him before the advent of Sir Henry Irving.

The Princess's had long been noted for its beauty and comfort. Kean improved it. His ambition was to make his theatre in all respects a standard of excellence. His pretensions have been hotly contested, and were so in his own day. His quarrel with Douglas Jerrold, however, redounds rather to his credit than Jerrold's. The attacks of Lewes in the *Leader* were more just. Lewes, at least, appreciated Kean's work for the newer school of drama, which to Jerrold was an abomination.

Of the chief critical objections to Kean, however, there can be but one opinion. He was not a great actor, and the prominence which good fortune and his own uprightness and diligence won for him made him a target for rather more abuse than he deserved. If there was envy, and even malice, in the campaign against him, as his biographer, Cole, asserts, there was also a very general and perhaps just resentment felt and freely expressed because a man of Kean's admitted limitations should enjoy a dramatic celebrity that Macready, who was abler, and Phelps, whom many thought to be Kean's superior, deserved at least in equal measure.

That Kean himself was a pretender or a quack, there is, I believe, no shadow of proof. It is to the revivals of Kean rather than to those of Macready that Irving and Terry owed their inspiration. Many other young artists who later adorned the London stage served an apprenticeship at the Princess's. Lewes exposed Kean's fundamental weakness, when, in anticipation of the Princess's engagement, he wrote: "We suggest that the experiment be fairly tried, and that instead of spending thousands upon decorations, he spend half the sum on new plays; for people will go to see a new play; whereas, however they may be delighted with it, they do not go merely for the getting up." Lewes thus ironically foresaw that Kean's chief endeavor would concern, not the drama itself, but its "getting up."

Kean's contribution to the London stage, however, was not wholly one of finery. He was the first manager making high pretensions to legitimacy who dared to espouse openly the claims of the later and better type of French romantic and melodramatic art. This fact is sometimes forgotten by those who find in his work only lace and tinsel, or, at best, their mental counterpart, pedantry. By his sympathetic attempts to bring the style of his stage into harmony with that of France, he did more — because of his high station — than anyone else, even Vestris, could have accomplished. More than anything during the century, his labor prepared the way for the revolution generally attributed uniquely to Fechter.

In this connection, it is interesting to see that in the course of time the violence of opposition was mitigated, and that some who opposed him ferociously at the start found beauty, dignity, and even beneficial reform in his ways of staging and his principles of choice.

Let us first consider his service to Shakespearean art. Beauty and scholarly perfection were its high aims. In point of perfection, his production far outdistanced Macready's noblest efforts, and it fell only so far short of Irving's still greater glory, as the limits of light and mechanism at the Princess's and the scenic art standards of his day were inferior to Irving's. The excellence of effect went far beyond scenery and costumes. Kean endeavored always to have a company of uniform excellence, and to exhibit its members in parts best suited to their abilities. He drilled this company so that everyone, down to the merest mechanic and supernumerary, should produce the effect required of him in the most harmonious and telling manner. His own self-control and diligence he imparted to all with whom he worked. There was in his theatre no more of that violent point-making and distortion of the dramatist's intent which had so marred the work even of Macready. Kean's mastery in all these respects admits of no question. Even his enemies praised it.

Although his repertory of Shakespeare's plays was small when compared with that of his rival Phelps, it was varied, and suggestive of the resources of his theatre. His engagement at the Princess's in 1850 began with a performance of *Twelfth Night*. Even Lewes had to admit that there "never was a better first night." He also went so far as to say: "Never do we remember to have seen *Twelfth Night* so well played; never perhaps was it relished with such gusto. It showed how much could be done by casting a play well." He was pleased to find a "sufficient splendor of scenery and costume without prodigality of spectacle."[1]

In leisurely succession appeared *Hamlet*, *As You Like It*, *Macbeth*, *King John*, *Richard III*, *Henry VIII*, *A Winter's Tale*, *Henry IV*, Part I, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard II*, *The Tempest*, *King Lear*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Henry V*. In brilliancy each of these revivals seemed far to excel all that had preceded. Of *King John* in 1852 Lewes exclaimed: "It surpasses everything in the way of *mise en scène* which this theatre has yet attempted. . . . The spectacle is truly pictorial and striking . . . the groupings very admirable, . . . they were unlike stage movements in general."[2] Upon *Henry VIII* a much more lavish expenditure was made. "For correctness and gorgeous display," said an admiring reviewer in the *Theatrical Journal*, "it must be equal to the time of Harry the Eighth itself . . . . What can we say sufficiently to praise the stage arrangements and appointments, which, like all the rest, came under the immediate superintendence of Mr. Charles Kean, who should henceforth be denominated the Prince of Managers. They are perfect, more perfect than we have ever beheld them." The writer then remarked: "The appearance of the angels in the dream of *Queen Katherine*, if not coming too near to spiritual manifestation is full of ethereal grandeur, and has a most impressive effect upon the audience, who, while this scene is enacted, sit like statues, as though divinity indeed were arranged before them."[3] So successful was this play that with it the long run, as a definite policy, may be said to have begun.

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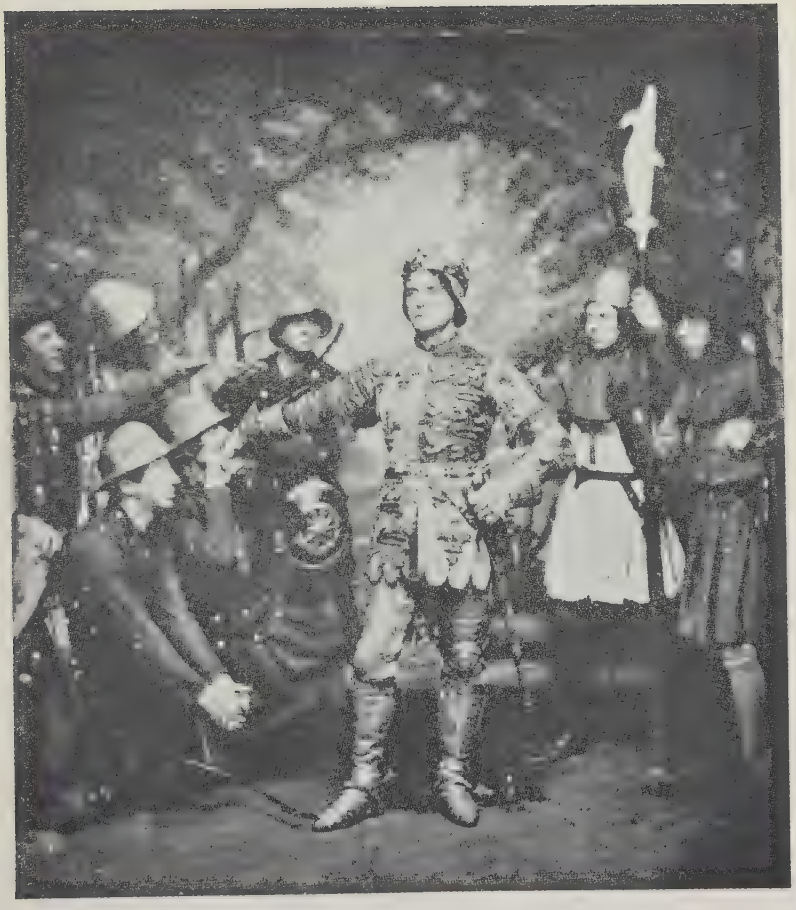
[1] *Leader*, Oct. 5, 1850. The first performance was given Sept. 28. Lewes had never admired Kean, although his quarrel with him was of a later date.

[2] *Ibid.*, Feb. 14, 1852.

[3] B. W. Watkins in *Theat. Jour.*, June 6, 1855. For an account of Kean's *Richard II*, see Baker, p. 486.



Charles Kean in a Scene from "Henry V"
Photograph showing actual grouping of supernumeraries

Perhaps even more magnificent than any of the Shakespearean productions was the mounting of Byron's *Sardanapalus*, in which Kean and his artist availed themselves of the results of recent excavations at Nineveh to create as nearly as possible a correct historic setting for the play. For our present purpose, however, we need enter into no further detail. All who have treated Kean's management agree that his work was unsurpassed, and his training of his company and especially of the supernumeraries in mobs and processions, was of the most thorough and effective character possible at the time to conceive.

Great as was Kean's contribution to the English stage as a producer of plays from the conventional repertory, his real claim to distinction as an innovator was his fearless introduction of French plays and the French romantic type of acting upon a footing of equality with the work of the older English school. So important was this point, which I believe has not been sufficiently stressed in the study of Kean's management, that I must make clear the impression it made on different elements of Kean's public. The following article from the *Journal* makes the significance of this innovation appear against the background of the popular dramatic tradition:

> The production of the dramas of *Pauline* and *The Corsican Brothers* at the Princess' Theatre may be regarded as an era in the history of the drama. Not only has Mr. Kean had the courage to break through the absurd custom of legitimate managers of confining their efforts to the production of five-act plays, but he has conferred a signal benefit on the drama, by introducing to the notice of English play-goers, two pieces from the Theatre Porte St. Martin, of a nature altogether new to them. By so doing he has incurred the displeasure of a certain portion of the press. We, on the contrary, think that he is entitled to praise rather than censure.[1]

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[1] *Theat. Jour.*, May 12, 1852.

The characteristics of the new *genre* which appealed most strongly to the writer of the article were: the abundance of action, the economy and aptness of the dialogue, and the careful dramatic structure of the new pieces. "They use only such dialogue as they would use if actually engaged in the scenes represented; and, by discarding all inflated and bombastic language, they avoid the absurdity of making a peasant utter sentiments worthy of a divine, couched in language worthy of a scholar." [1]

Other writers welcomed the new art in a contrary spirit:

> The Queen [one of them moaned] has been to see this vulgar Victorian trash four times, and she might just as well go to the saloons and witness blood and murder pieces as this silly, wild, and impossible farrago. Good heaven! It seems incredible that in a Christian land such things can be.
>
> In this piece (*The Corsican Brothers*) we have lewd ballet girls introduced, speaking in the most offensive way, and the finale is a duel . . . a hobgoblin apparition, a ghost, and a duel — genuine old Rich nonsense — at the Royal Princess Theatre.[2]

Here, indeed, was a clash between the new and the old. While a constantly diminishing number of the conservatives assumed a violent attitude of opposition, the populace and the more liberal followers of the stage found the innovation agreeable and interesting, and cared very little whether it was revolutionary or not. Kean won followers in spite of much abuse. Many of the opposition had to admit that Kean on the whole was rendering a real and great service to the stage. The "legitimates," however, refused to profess a fondness for "French trash" or even admiration for Kean's manner of interpretation. Thus we find the *Theatrical Journal*, which at the beginning of Kean's management was inclined to be captious and antagonistic as to Kean's pretensions, toward the end of his management, asserting loudly that it had always been a staunch supporter, whereas most of the London papers had changed from violent opposition to admiration and praise.

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[1] *Theat. Jour.*, May 12, 1852.

[2] *Ibid.*, May 19, 1852.

This polemic spirit, however, did much to concentrate the attention of critics and public alike upon the performances at the Princess's, and was no doubt a challenge to Kean to put forth every effort to redeem the reputation which the royal patronage had given him, but which the journalistic world had done its best to destroy.

Kean's service to the London stage had, notwithstanding, been of the highest importance. Granted that he might wisely have given less attention to the "getting up" and made more effort to encourage "struggling dramatists," there yet remains to his credit a large share of theatrical honors. It must now surely be admitted that no great gain could have come to the stage if the poetical drama, such as Marston was laboriously penning, or even the Jerrold dramas and comedies which were a reflection of the past rather than a foreshadowing of the future, had been given a prominent place in Kean's repertory. Kean, no doubt, did a greater service to his art, and hastened more surely the coming of better days by turning to Boucicault and his French adaptations. If the process was discouraging to the more loyal school of the "legitimate" it was also a challenge to their ingenuity.

To the Kean management are due many other important changes from the old conditions, under which drama had miserably failed, to the newer and more favorable conditions of the later Victorian stage. His theatre, far more than Phelps's distant Islington house, bridged the gap between the collapse of the majors in 1843 and the coming of a wholly new dramatic world in 1860. Not only did Kean's Princess's fill this void, but it reflected clearly the tendencies of the day, and did much to prepare the popular mind for what in the next generation it accepted without protest. It is hardly an exaggeration to assert that Charles Kean and Madame Vestris were the originators of our present-day stage methods. Kean, whose work came later and was done under much more favorable auspices, naturally went farther than Vestris; but without her work it is doubtful that Kean at the Princess's could have builded as he did.

Under him the use of the small theatre for the higher reaches of the drama, although anticipated by Vestris, was triumphantly vindicated. With him, too, came into vogue new methods of stage economy, without which there was no hope of future success. Besides limiting his performances each evening to a curtain raiser and one substantial production, he instituted the "long run." If we admit quite frankly all the evils traceable to this departure, it was, when considered in the light of previous experience in the financing of the drama, of the greatest benefit both to managers and dramatists, and made possible, perhaps more than any other one change, the financial success of modern theatrical entertainment. I am not convinced that in other respects the practice has not justified itself, for before Kean's day the artistic results due to the frequent change of bill were not, so far as I have been able to ascertain, as great as we are nowadays led to suppose.

How the change to the long run came about it may pay us briefly to inquire. Before Kean's Princess's engagement, long runs had been known, but generally in the case of afterpieces. Thus *Tom and Jerry*, *Black-eyed Susan*, *The Coronation*, and the *Cataract of the Ganges*, as early as the twenties, were prolonged for weeks and months. For plays of a more serious character, however, a consecutive run of a fortnight was considered a marked success. For a production to run fifty nights was an indication of the greatest popularity. When such runs occurred, critics declared them a menace to the drama. "In our opinion," said a writer in 1821, "no drama, however successful, should be run night after night beyond a ninth time." [1] Not theory, however, but custom and demand regulated the practice of managers. Plays were continued successively as long as the public would attend: and the drawing power of most productions during the monopoly period — at least those at the major theatres — lasted only a fortnight. Such performances, however, might judiciously be repeated at intervals about fifty times in the course of a year.

Charles Kean's revivals created a popular demand sufficient to prolong their repetitions to unheard-of lengths. This fact resulted partly from the increased interest of the aristocracy, and partly from the super-magnificence with which the plays were staged. Kean at the beginning of his career seems not to have aimed at long runs more than his predecessors. The *Merry Wives*, given in 1852, ran only twenty-five times; *King John*, which was lavishly mounted, continued uninterruptedly for only a fortnight, and was then alternated with *The Corsican Brothers*, for a total of sixty-six performances the first season. *Macbeth* in 1853 ran three times a week for twenty weeks, and in 1855, *Louis XI* was continued sixty-two consecutive nights.

The marked change resulted from the unparalleled splendor of *Henry VIII*, produced in the same year, and repeated without a break for one hundred nights. The best previous record for a single production that Cole,[2] Kean's biographer, could cite was Fanny Kemble's run of forty performances in *Romeo and Juliet* in the season of 1829–30. Many "illegitimate" productions, however, had surpassed this record. With *Henry VIII*, therefore, one hundred nights became the standard for future productions. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ran one hundred and fifty nights, and Cole declared that a hundred nights was the usual length of a Kean production. Let us here remember that Macready considered an unbroken run of twenty-one nights for his *Henry V* phenomenal, and a total of fifty-five nights for *The Tempest*, though not consecutive, a stupendous success. The precedent for the long run, thus firmly established on the legitimate stage, led within ten years to conditions making possible the astounding results attained by Sothern in *Dundreary*, which ran not only into months but into years. So, too, the Bancrofts continued *Ours* for 700 nights and *Caste* for 600 nights. *School* was performed in all 800 times.

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, no. 31, Oct. 29, 1821.

[2] *Diaries*, June 20, 1839.

It has often been stated that the long run was due principally to the change to the smaller theatres, the capacity of which was much less than that of the monopoly houses. Although this change, no doubt, had much to do with the long run, the limited capacity of the Princess's theatre seems to have made no real difference in prolonging the runs. The audiences at Macready's theatre were in reality hardly larger than those at the Princess's. He tells us that for the fifty-five performances of *The Tempest* his receipts averaged only £230, which, he added, "is no common event." Kean's nightly intake at the Princess's averaged £250, with prices essentially the same. In other words, Macready's house was rarely more than one third filled, and Kean's was generally filled to capacity. Conditions in Macready's day had limited the attendance at his performances quite as effectually as the walls of Kean's little Princess's theatre had confined his patronage. The cause of the long run, it must therefore be assumed, lay outside the physical limitations of the house. The intimacy and coziness of the smaller theatre served undoubtedly to increase Kean's popularity and therefore to prolong his runs. But the primary cause of his success was to be found in the lavishness and care of his productions, the freshness of his theatrical methods, and the dignity that royal favor had given to his stage.

Although it has been usual to trace what is now called the "star system" to the growth of the long run, in Kean's own case the tendency seemed rather the other way. One writer enthusiastically declared, "The days of starring are over!"[1] Although unduly optimistic, this compliment paid to the Kean reforms was merited. There was in his performances so undeniable an attempt to give every rôle an adequate rendition, that playgoers, who had seen the egotistical extravagances of Edmund Kean and the haughty superiority of Macready, found in the younger Kean's work a much less evident attempt to exploit a single part at the expense of the general effect. If a new kind of star system was being fostered, the older and far more pernicious one was rapidly being suppressed. In this very fact lay another claim of Kean's management to grateful respect.

A man of Kean's personal unpopularity with critics and ambitious dramatists was of course maligned and misrepresented. The Queen had stipulated especially that in his work as Master of the Revels at Windsor, he was to stage the plays chosen with careful regard for the appropriateness of characters, and, to this end, was to draw upon all the London companies. Although bitter jealousies were thus stirred, and although Kean was repeatedly blamed for bringing himself, his wife, and his company, unduly before his royal patrons, I have discovered nothing to confirm the truth of these charges. Although there might often be differences of opinion as to his choice, it does not appear that he deliberately betrayed his high trust, either before the court, or before the more interested auditory, his public.

What, then, was Kean's contribution to the dramatic progress we are attempting to follow? He represents, I believe, as clearly as any figure, the changes that came about between the freeing of the theatres and the establishment of the present-day stage. While giving the older plays of the legitimate repertory the most careful representation of which we have any record before 1870, he was not, like Macready, indifferent to the claims of the newer foreign types of art. He believed that the English stage should profit by the achievement of the French, and he therefore dared boldly to defy those English critics who flew into a passion when they saw the plays of French origin paraded with Shakespeare's, on a stage which, by more direct royal sanction than had previously been given any English theatre, had become the chief home of the drama. He had brought into existence, furthermore, a wholly new method of management, which, with slight changes, has continued until the present day. We may conclude, therefore, that Kean for the legitimate drama, like Vestris and Mathews for the "illegitimate," took the first decisive step in advance, freeing the stage from the ill effects of the monopoly. He introduced a new mode of representation of the romantic drama, fashioned to suit the newer French types of Hugo, Dumas, and Delavigne, and he applied it in part to Shakespearean plays, which he mounted with a splendor and accuracy that surpassed all previous effort. He did more. He attracted the refined classes to the theatre, and worthily maintained the royal favor. Lastly he created for the legitimate drama the first real prosperity it had known since Kemble. Although his lavish expense of £30,000 annually, made possible by his own established fortune, was in excess of the receipts of his theatre, he had, by the long run, the small company, and a shortened program, made possible an economy that was later to make the fortunes of playwrights and managers alike. Although he himself fostered no new English drama he did his full share artistically and materially to make such a drama possible.

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[1] *Theat. Jour.*, Jan. 5, 1853.

Chapter XI

THE REVOLUTIONISTS: FECHTER AND BOUCICAULT

WHAT Kean had begun hesitantly as an experiment, Fechter, on the same stage, completed as a positive revolutionary triumph. Even Dickens, a constant and appreciative patron of the stage, pronounced the work of Fechter one of the most complete revolutions in art that it was possible to imagine. Because the appearance of this celebrated French actor with an English-speaking company, on November 3, 1860, is generally assumed to have marked the beginning of our contemporary stagecraft, we must pay to his work a commensurate respect.

Viewed externally, his English début marked the decisive victory of French methods over the English stage tradition. For the time being, all doubts as to the superiority of the French art, which in Charles Kean's generation had seemed heretical and disloyal, were dispelled. Fechter's attack was the more overwhelming because it was made not merely in works of French origin but, at the same time, in the most sacred of Shakespeare's dramas — *Hamlet!* In both kinds, his "reform" was the nearest approach to a stage revolution in the history of English drama.

All this may mean little or much according to our understanding of the conditions Fechter reformed, and the type of performance which he substituted. In the theatres of Charles Kean and Madame Vestris French art of the better sort was familiar in English long before the coming of Fechter. Vestris, however, exploited merely the lighter varieties of the vaudeville type. Kean interpreted the French plays with traditional English histrionics but slightly modified. Although Kean's innovations were enough to create storms of protest, they were not sufficiently impressive to be considered triumphant by that part of the public which assumed critical responsibility for the fate of the English drama. Kean, moreover, had not been bold enough to meddle seriously with Shakespeare. Not in *Hamlet* but in *The Corsican Brothers* and *Pauline* was Kean unconventional. Even in these performances, there was much more of the English tradition than of the French innovation. What was termed his "gentlemanly melodrama" was essentially a melodrama of the English gentleman. At best, Kean had but predisposed the better class of English playgoers in favor of the French school. He had won for it no decisive victory.

French art in the original tongue, too, had long been familiar in London. We have already had occasion to mention visits of French companies to such theatres as the Queen's, the Lyceum, and the St. James's. Although they drew their audiences chiefly from the foreign population of the city, they became a fad among the aristocrats and the *litterati*. During the period we have been considering, the great figure of Rachel dominated the work at the St. James's, and brought the fashionable world to her feet, much as Bernhardt did later. Fechter himself, acting in French at the St. James's, had already made a name for himself with this select public. Critics capable of understanding the French work, like Lewes, never tired of disparaging the English traditional stage in comparison with the French. This cordiality to the French players among the higher classes was in itself, as the Drury Lane riots clearly showed, one of the chief reasons why Kean's innovation had been violently opposed by the conservatives of pit and green-room alike.

The works so far presented by the French visitors had been selected chiefly from the classical repertory or from the more recent romance plays of the Hugo-Dumas school. Although Fechter himself had created the part of Armand Duval in *La Dame aux Camélias* in its Paris representation, English moral standards and English officialdom effectually debarred realistic works of this type, even in a foreign tongue. When by some chance, at the opera, Verdi's *La Traviata* was given a hearing, there was a beautiful display of moral indignation.

The advances made in England by the French school before Fechter threw off the shackles of his mother-tongue had all the character of the exotic. On November 3, 1860, he appeared in *Ruy Blas* at the Princess's, and shortly afterwards as Hamlet, using the English language. His work in *Ruy Blas*, though interesting and novel, would not in itself have created a sensation. French art was already familiar to all classes of the public. In this part, Fechter was admired rather because he had made himself proficient in a foreign tongue, and was thereby able to communicate the charm of his native art to a foreign audience directly. His person was comely and romantic, his love-making was entrancing, his personal magnetism was stronger than any actor's since the time of Edmund Kean.

Had Fechter's work ended with *Ruy Blas*, it would have been a stimulating influence, but little more. His revolution was achieved in *Hamlet*. In *Ruy Blas*, he was merely the French lover that nature had made him, but as the Royal Dane he flung a challenge to British tradition. He had engaged in a battle royal. No stage event could have been more fraught with significance. The public was greatly stirred in anticipation. Never, people believed, could the broken English of a French melodramatic actor rise to the heights of poetic diction sustained by Burbage, Betterton, Garrick, Kemble, Kean the older, Macready, Phelps, or even Kean the younger. The first night was one of the tensest in stage history. Many went to damn, and would fiercely have taken advantage of a serious lapse in the actor's performance. Few, however, went home without a new sense of the possibilities of the stage, and fewer yet with any doubt as to Fechter's triumph. As Dickens said, never was a reform more complete. As a dramatic missionary to the English, Fechter had converted the nation.

In just what did his amazing revolution consist? Viewed in the light of the more recent Hamlets of Irving and Forbes-Robertson, it appears devoid of permanent value. It was not Fechter's acting of Hamlet — which, as we shall see later, was in itself meretricious — but his romantic spirit of production and management that gave to the English stage a new principle. This principle was that of unconventionality. Fechter's production of *Hamlet* was great chiefly because nothing in the play was done as it had ever been done before. His principle was right, but his precept was dangerous. For perfect success, it presupposed on the part of the manager an understanding and a critical study which Fechter himself failed to manifest. In reality he did not give *Hamlet* a new reading, he merely restaged it in the fashion of "gentlemanly melodrama." His novelty was his own tradition. Posture and pantomime, which were the stock in trade of the Pixérécourt and Ducange melodrama, were now introduced to heighten the effect of scenes which English producers had considered sufficiently effective without. How this change appealed to a contemporary playgoer we may judge from the following description:

> When this cleverly acted scene [in the queen's closet] closes, and his mother, in going, advances towards him with outstretched hands, how effectively studied is the position of Mr. Fechter, where he holds the portrait of his father before her, rapidly glances at the portal through which the spirit . . . has just issued, and then at the body of the murdered Polonius.[1]

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[1] *Theat. Jour.*, June 15, 1864; article by B. W. Watkins.

Let us look at his prompt-book, for that gives us direct access to his methods and reveals the minute attention to detail that was Fecher's first managerial virtue. The illustration selected is from Fechter's stage arrangement of *Othello*, which, although admittedly less successful than his *Hamlet*, shows more clearly the nature of his innovations.

The following passage is illuminating:

> Iago (with a look of the basilisk darting the sting which he had kept for the last) She did deceive her father marrying you,
> And when she seem'd to shake and fear your looks,
> She lov'd them most.
>
> (Othello stops at once as struck by a thunderbolt! His face changes by degrees, his eyes open as if a veil had been taken away.)

The action assigned here to Iago is that of ruddy melodrama. Nothing could more completely destroy the subtlety of Shakespeare's intention.

Again we read that Iago is to "halloa in *Othello's* ear from behind," and that Othello "is to start by seeing his face in the glass." Similarly, by Fechter's stage direction, a new light is thrown on the passage: "It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul"; for he naïvely adds, "looking in a mirror"!

Another passage, in which character and sense give way to an absurd melodramatic effect, is the following:

> *Othello.* — O Desdemon, away, away, away!
> *Desdemona.* — Alas, the heavy day (lying at his feet and kissing his dress, which she bathes with her tears.)

Such was the magic of Fechter's revolution in the production of Shakespearean drama. We must grant, however, its popular success, and gratefully acknowledge that it opened the way on the English stage for new methods of representation. Otherwise Fechter's glory was a personal one. His charm had caused the stolid English public to accept his novelty and with it a violation of sacred traditions; but the nature of the changes calmer reflection could not, and, indeed, did not approve. Although for Fechter there was a considerable "rage," it soon passed. Within ten years he was obliged to retire from London to the provinces and to America. It was no small achievement, however, to have done away, at a single stroke, with the pernicious habit of "points" and with bombastic declamation; this destructive service is Fechter's just and worthy claim to celebrity.

From 1865 to 1867 Fechter managed the Lyceum, and continued there the furor of his earlier years, but with less success. After the virtual failure of his *Othello*, he confined himself to his native drama, and sated the public appetite for such works as *The Duke's Motto*, *Beldomino*, *The King's Butterfly*, *The Roadside Inn* (*Robert Macaire*), *Ruy Blas*, and some English romances, like Scott's *Ravenswood*. The pace of realism, however, was quickening. What had seemed revolutionarily real in 1860 was now regarded as melodramatic, and had already become a convention. In the meantime, the English public was making the acquaintance of the more vital and enduring drama of the Robertson school. The Fechter reforms were soon forgotten in the flood of new life which they had helped, more, perhaps, than any other single influence, to introduce. Fechter had, however, taught actors not to enter rooms by the wings, but by doors at the back, and he had smashed every sacred tradition hedging the legitimate art. He had proudly heralded the way for a new and better school of English drama.

Among those who watched the Fechter experiment, no one welcomed more eagerly the collapse of the Sheridan and Shakespeare traditions than Dion Boucicault, who had closely and shrewdly followed the dramatic currents in their relation to the public. While Fechter was at work, with the zeal of a French dramatic missionary, Boucicault was as busily engaged — but without one touch of fanaticism — in naturalizing French art. The conception of the legitimate in his mind had died with the patents themselves. A new situation and a new popular mind had come into existence that brooked no compromise with the past. With the practical zeal of one who first and always courted success, Boucicault committed himself without reserve to the new movement and to its corresponding popular psychology. He shared Elliston's contempt for critics — not in the secret company of his friends, but boldly and solemnly in print. As early as 1845 he made his uncompromising attitude perfectly clear. In that year his *Curiosities of Literature* appeared, with an ironical dedication to the press:

> When you are unanimous [said the self-sufficient novice], your unanimity is wonderful; to its magic influence I owe the popularity already attending my comedy (I beg pardon) farce of *Alma Mater*. Your abuse of it was hearty, I would only have wished it to be more personal — may I hope you will extend a like favor to this little extravaganza? . . . I feel confident you will . . . damn me freely in your journals and save me in public opinion.[1]

This same spirit of irreverence for any standards of art, except those he thought would appeal to the popular taste, characterized without exception, I believe, his long and brilliant career as playwright, actor, and manager.

Whatever his sins, we must grant him the unquestioned distinction of being the most open-minded experimenter — also the most indefatigable one — that appeared from 1800 to 1865. By the time he reappeared in 1860, after his work in America, his experimentation had led him into the composition of his definitely characteristic type of play — of a style as remote from his 1841 success of *London Assurance* as may well be imagined. His *Colleen Bawn*, which took London by storm, was unmistakably what the people wanted, and the knack of satisfying them had been the development of the intervening period of experimentation.

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[1] Dedication to the first edition of *Curiosities of Literature*.

The year 1852 marked the complete break between the Boucicault of *London Assurance* — and therefore of the English tradition — and the Boucicault of sensation, sentimentality, and intense realism. In that year at the Princess's he enjoyed the immense popularity of *The Corsican Brothers* and of another but lesser success, *The Prima Donna*. He had previously worked in the melodrama of a more romantic scope, as for instance in *Don Cæsar de Bazan*, which he worked over with Buckstone. But in 1852, it seems, he had proved to his own satisfaction, that the public were ready for the last ingredient of his workmanship, that of sentimentality. In *London Assurance* there had been wit and ingenuity and a touch of realism. In *Don Cæsar* there had been romance and sensation. In *The Corsican Brothers*, there were all of these characteristics carried to much greater lengths than ever before. In *The Prima Donna*, he professed to make the discovery that what the people now wanted was the refined sentimental comedy. This experiment, he tells us in the preface to the 1852 edition, he made in spite of the advice of his literary friends, who declared that the "sentimental comedies, so popular at the Gymnase Theatre in Paris, were unsuited to the taste of the London Public."

> In spite of this opinion [he says further], I wrote *The Prima Donna*. I think I may conscientiously say that I offered it to every manager in London, by whom it was particularly admired, and returned to me with thanks.
>
> At last I induced Mr. Kean to allow me to read it to him; he accepted it at once, and pronounced his faith in its success: (although I must do him the justice to say that I read him to sleep).
>
> The question, then [Boucicault concluded], is settled, and

the London public will accept this class of drama; and what is more *we have artists who can render it with spirit and finesse.*[1]

Besides throwing much light upon Boucicault's methods of work, this declaration of his faith in the sentimental, as a means of winning the public, is of great importance in determining his dramatic development. Only once again, I believe, did he venture into the field of comedy without sentiment. That was in a play written for the Bancrofts in 1867, called *How She Loved Him.* He wrote to his managers concerning the failure:

> I regret that my comedy was caviare to the public. I doubted its agreement with their taste and stomach, and so told you before it was played. . . . The public pretend they want pure comedy; this is not so. What they want is *domestic drama*, treated with broad comic character. *A sentimental, pathetic play*, *comically rendered*, such as *Ours*, *The Colleen Bawn*, *Arrah-na-Pogue.*[2]

Sentimentality, wit, and sensation, therefore, cast in the mould of melodrama, appears to have been the formula for plays with which Boucicault departed for America. When he returned, he had gathered the last important contribution to his technique — that of strong local color. A rich and genuine Irish humor had relieved the sharp and often labored wit of the earlier comedies. Thus, too, Boucicault was enabled to put upon his stage real personages of his own experience, instead of the theatrical effigies, clad from the wardrobes of many stage generations, now in the style of Goldsmith and Sheridan, now in that of Cumberland and Colman, or again in the imported and modish manner of Pixérécourt and Scribe. Less successful, but of the same sort, was his endeavor to reflect the American types of Indian, negro, slave-driver, Cavalier, and Yankee, in his *Octoroon.*

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[1] Cole, Kean's biographer, did not seem so much impressed by the popularity of this play, for he remarked merely: "It pleased without being attractive." *Life and Times of C. Kean*, ii, 40. Italics are mine.

[2] The Bancrofts, p. 195. The italics are mine.

The local color, the sensation, the craft of the melodrama, and to make all these doubly sure, the extreme activity of mechanician and scene-shifter, made up the Boucicault drama of 1860, which contributed powerfully to that new dramatic era. It was realistic for its times, and the more attractive because it was sensationally realistic. There were in this realism, however, the saving qualities of romance and sentimentality, which were the results of twenty years of experimentation. Here was realism without its sting, its pessimistic afterthought; here was humor true to the life the audience knew; here were wit, song, and endless thrills. Almost by mathematical calculation, the proportions had been adjusted to the popular psychology of the middle of the nineteenth century.

It would be difficult to find in the whole range of literature, a more obvious or interesting case of dramatic experimentation, guided solely by the tastes and disposition of a clever dramatist untrammeled by precedent and reacting simply upon the popular mind. Boucicault and the English-speaking public, then, may be said to have cooperated in perfect harmony, with the result that there came into existence a more naturalized drama than had been seen previously during the century. It was inartistic in so far as Boucicault preferred popular approval to that of literary critics; and it was crude because the public that paid for it was not exacting enough to demand anything better. There was in the Boucicault plays, in spite of these reflections, a bright flame of genius that the public recognized with avidity. Without this, all the sensation, sentimentality, and machinery in the world would never have made Boucicault the influence he proved to be. Who shall say that he would have helped the stage more if he had continued writing in the defunct dramatic vein of *London Assurance?* So far, at least, as his own pocket-book was concerned, Boucicault chose the better course.

Dion Boucicault as Conn

Photograph of an actual scene in an early production of "The Shaughraun"

No dramatist whom we have to consider kept more closely in touch with the living stage and its public than Boucicault. What Boucicault's public was like we may infer, not only from the plays it best loved, but from many word pictures such as the following from the carefully critical observer Henry Morley, who asserted:

> The great want of the stage in our day is an educated public that will care for its successes, honestly inquire into its failures, and make managers and actors feel that they are not dependent for appreciation of their efforts on the verdict that comes of the one mind divided into fragments between Mr. Dapperwit in the stalls, Lord Froth in the side boxes, and Pompey Doodle in the gallery.

Others had tried, and tried in vain, to defy the judgment of this public; and the public would have none of them. Boucicault frankly and uncompromisingly abandoned himself to the temper of his public, believing that in it lay the only sure guide to a vital drama. It was not his fault if his public, unlike that for which Shakespeare wrote, did not demand pregnant phrasing and a wealth of diction. That amusingly extravagant compliment was not, perhaps, in all respects misapplied, which pronounced Boucicault the "Shakespeare of the nineteenth century."

In his methods of staging he was as careful and insistent as Kean and Fechter, and far more inventive. His invention, however, showed itself chiefly in the arranging of effects which savored too much of the charlatan and showman to merit notice as art. Even the critics of his own day, while admitting his wit, the charm of his humor, and his occasional flashes of inspiration, turned in disgust from the stage trickery by which alone, in their opinion, he was able to attract the public. City streets, and real street lamps, hansom cabs, flaming buildings consumed *in toto* before the eyes of the audience — such, in the opinion of the more conservative of his public, were the essential contributions of the Boucicault drama. In this respect, there can be no doubt, Boucicault outdistanced all earlier periods. His strikingly "real effects" made the faint foreshadowings of the *Castle Spectre*, *The Tale of Mystery*, *A Chain of Events*, and even *The Corsican Brothers*, successes of a past and distant age. Look for a moment at the fourth act of *The Octoroon*. Remember that cameras were new to the public and apparently as little familiar to Boucicault as to his audience. But nothing on the stage seems quite so real as a recent invention. The principal business of this act is the trial of the Indian, Walmotee, accused by the villain McClosky of the murder of Paul. The evidence is strongly against the unlucky Walmotee. In spite of the adorable Scudder's noble plea for fair play, the Indian is in for a lynching. It is then discovered that a plate in a camera left standing alone had of its own free will (!) recorded the murder, showing McClosky in the embarrassing rôle of assassin. Immediately the Indian is released, and McClosky is dragged off toward the steamer that is to conduct him to his well-earned reward. This much sensation might have satisfied a less enterprising dramatist of those days — but not Boucicault. McClosky breaks loose, sets fire to leaking turpentine, and nearly escapes. But the hand of Nemesis strikes him down. The Indian, whose unimpeachable character he has tried to besmirch, grapples him in a struggle to the death. All rush madly on to the scene, as McClosky draws his melodramatic last. Wild confusion increases. No one has thought of the burning fluid. The vessel enveloped in flames blows up, affording a pyrotechnical tableau upon which the curtain falls, with the certainty of a half-dozen recalls.

This ending is the more interesting because Boucicault developed it consciously to appeal to the popular mind. As first played in America and London, his drama ended more in the style of a genuine tragedy, with the death of the Octoroon by poison. This conclusion so displeased the London public that Boucicault, while professing amazement at their "change of taste," bowed to his masters, and substituted the ending here described.[1]

It is difficult for us to realize the impression made by the Boucicault claptrap upon an audience which regarded even an electric moon as a novelty, and a reflected ghost a miracle. Even those who disapproved the bent of his genius admitted his supremacy in his chosen field. "His mastery of stage effects and expedients," Archer declared, "is unrivalled on this side of the Channel." [2]

Interesting in comparison with this meretricious stage trickery in *The Octoroon* was the more dramatic sensation introduced by Boucicault at Kean's theatre with *The Corsican Brothers*, in 1852. G. H. Lewes has given us a vivid account of the new manner:

> Nothing can exceed the art with which this [the apparition] is managed, with ghostly terror, heightened by the low tremolos of the violins, and the dim light upon the stage, and the audience, breath suspended, watches the slow apparition and the vision of the duel which succeeds; a scenic effect more real and terrifying than anything I remember.[3]

Speaking of the management of a scene in the third act, in which swords are broken and used as daggers, Lewes gives us the following vivid description:

> Fastening them in their grasp by cambric handkerchiefs, *they fight as with knives*. This does not read as horrible, perhaps; but to see it on the stage, represented with minute ferocity of detail, and with a truth on the part of the actors, which enhances the terror, the effect is so intense, so horrible, so startling, that one gentleman indignantly exclaimed, "*Un-English!*"

[1] See *Theat. Jour.*, Nov. 27, 1861.

[2] In Ward's *Reign of Victoria*, ii, 581.

[3] *Leader*, Feb. 28, 1852.

Reflecting, then, upon this refined savagery, Lewes truly forecast the course of events in melodrama during the sixties. "It is the fatality of melodrama to know no limit. The tendency of the senses is *downwards*. To gratify them, stimulants must be added and added, chili upon cayenne, butchery upon murder, 'horrors upon horrors' head accumulated.'"

Triumphant in purse and fame, Boucicault naturally looked with perfect complacence upon the scorn of critics and upon the puny efforts of the "old school." He knew, what perhaps they did not, that there was in his plays more than sensation, and that something — call it ingenuity, freshness, the contemporary spirit, or what you will — was as essential as his opponents' efforts were futile. In the midst of fustian, now and then a genuine picture of life convinced his audiences that they were witnessing a new drama; one, at least, that awakened in them a lively interest and pleasure. The "illegitimate" had at last come into its own. Its triumph in the public mind was complete.

In vain the conservatives marshalled their forces at Drury Lane for a last stand. Phelps, as we have said, with the best company Chatterton could gather, made there a spendid fight for the old faith. Boucicault, however, had the young blood and the strength of vitality on his side. At length his profane followers had desecrated the temple itself and taken permanent possession of it. They erected in place of the idol worshipped successively by Kemble, Kean, and Macready, the new, the disgusting, — even worse, — the popular fetish of the "illegitimate." And *Formosa*, the most daring play that Boucicault had so far written, triumphed, proving to the age that Byron and Shakespeare spelt ruin.

So much for Boucicault's literary ideals. But his service to the drama went much further than his literary contribution. In the way of business Boucicault approached, more nearly than anyone before him, present-day standards of management. To him is to be traced the abandonment of the stock company. For it he substituted the practice, now all but universal in the English-speaking world, of engaging actors for individual productions only. The old stock company with its waste, its monotony, and its own pernicious star system, which, under the older Kean, had allowed no play to be well cast, was doomed. The younger Kean had introduced the long run for productions. It remained for Boucicault to take the further step of fitting companies to productions, and not, as of old, fitting productions to companies. I do not wish to engage in a discussion of the value of stock companies, but if the practice of the first half of the nineteenth century were the only grounds on which the friends of English stock companies in "the good old times" could base their plea, it would be difficult for these advocates to establish their case.

This was not the only practical benefit that Boucicault conferred upon his suffering profession. His popularity as an author enabled him so to improve the dramatist's financial status as to make what hitherto had been a career of penury, even for successful dramatists, a sure and safe means of livelihood for anyone who could get a hearing with the public. To this end he established the practice of sharing in the receipts.

Unstable legal regulation [1] such as afflicted the theatres had previously worked the greatest hardships upon novice and veteran alike. Jerrold, whose plays enjoyed at least enough popularity to make the fortune of a present-day dramatist, could not make a living at his favorite occupation of play-building. Even more striking was the case of Knowles, many of whose plays were stock pieces in the repertory of every leading actor in England. At a banquet in 1842 Knowles responded to his introduction as "a literary character": "I wish myself anything but a literary character, as I stand before you a poor man, after having produced fifteen plays, all of which, if I might judge from their reception and criticisms upon them, have been successful."[1] Shortly afterward he abandoned the stage for the pulpit! Tom Taylor for the most successful melodrama of his times received in all only £150, and Charles Reade labored for ten years at an average return of £35 annually from his popular plays!

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[1] For the details of the struggle of authors to overcome the legal disabilities, see Appendix II.

Boucicault brought this state of affairs definitely to an end. By his work, original English plays were given an immense competitive value. Besides, he definitely changed the former practice of a specified return for each night, insisting upon an agreement with his producers, that he should share in proportion to the total receipts. In this manner he inaugurated an era of prosperity for dramatists — greater, perhaps, than that enjoyed by any other class of intellectual workers. For a play such as would have brought only sixty or one hundred pounds in 1850, Boucicault in 1866 received £6,500. Had he done nothing else for the stage, he should justly be celebrated for this single achievement. Granting that other factors entered into this result, it is still likely that, without Boucicault's personal influence and the new agreement he made with his managers, the prosperity of dramatic authors would have been greatly delayed, if, indeed, it had come about at all.

Robertson and the Bancrofts seconded the work of Boucicault, although quite independently. For *Society* in 1865, Robertson received one pound nightly. *Ours* in 1866 was paid for at the rate of two pounds nightly, and *Caste* in 1867 at the rate of three pounds nightly. Five pounds a performance was the highest rate paid that young author. His yearly salary in 1870 was £4,260 and in 1871, £3,760.[1] Thus Robertson and Boucicault enjoyed an affluence from their dramatic writings that no one since the time of the Colmans had even remotely approached.[2] At this, Boucicault's American rights, in the absence of international copyright, were not protected, and many other legal safeguards that have since doubly hedged the works of a dramatist were not in force. What Boucicault had done for the rights of the dramatist, it would seem, was merely the result of his own genius as playwright and dramatic trader. No new laws were passed that in any way altered the Authors' Act of 1833. It was rather a question of personal command. It had remained for Robertson, and more especially for Boucicault, to command.

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, no. 6419, July 21, 1842.

Boucicault, then, was not so much an introducer of new methods as a new dramatic force. His attitude toward the written drama was fearlessly irreverent. Although perhaps no practical dramatist had schooled himself more thoroughly in the literature of the stage, none had less reverence for the sanctities of the past. Convinced that the Elizabethan drama, either in the original or in imitation, had ceased to make a vital appeal, he abandoned himself to the search for a drama which his public would pay for. Whatever may be said of his motives or his principles, nothing was more essential in preparing the stage for any advance whatever, than the complete break which he was largely instrumental in effecting between the traditional and the live drama. In the lesser effects of scenery, costume, and stage play, he was master in a new and advanced school of realists.

We might have wished him less sure of himself, less confident of the popular judgment, less eager for financial success, and, above all, more reverent toward literary standards. We might wish that in dislodging Shakespeare he had himself proved a worthier substitute. No one, however, would be so harsh as to blame him for his uncompromising espousal of the principle essential to all living drama, namely, that a playwright must not imitate a past, however glorious, but must look for his material and his methods in the life of his own age.

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[1] For rate of payment, see *The Bancrofts*, p. 91; also the *Life and Times of T. W. Robertson*, pp. 221 and 283.

[2] Boucicault's failure was due rather to reckless dramatic speculation in management than to unfavorable conditions.

Whatever his aims, two things of lasting value to the English drama Boucicault accomplished. For twenty years he attracted the public to see plays that were contemporary in spirit and of native workmanship; what was even more astonishing, he raised the conditions of the dramatic author from penury to affluence and command.

Chapter XII

THE STREAM OF LIFE ON THE STAGE
THE SCENE

NOW that we have a confidential acquaintance with the managers, we may ask them to ring up the curtain and reveal their picture.

Let us spurn the critic who spurns the scene-painter. We do not mean to discuss, but merely to observe; for in the progress of the graphic arts upon the stage lay a contribution, by no means contemptible, to dramatic effect during the early nineteenth century. Let us guard, too, against the mistake of supposing that our present-day realistic, romantic, suggestive, or expressionistic scenes are effects that have come about spontaneously without traditional growth and natural reaction to that growth. Like all other branches of the dramatic tree put forth during the seventy years of our study, the scenic had also its vital, organic relations, both reflecting other tendencies and, in turn, suggesting and enforcing them. If we belong to the class of those with imaginations so vivid as to supply their own scenery on a barren stage, we may take little personal interest in all this tawdry business. Likes and dislikes, however, are not our present concern.

The scenery of the early-nineteenth-century stage was indispensable and, in any case, was a fact. As a fact it presents an interest that must ever attach to progress. If it was the least important of the contributions with which we are busied, it was, nevertheless, an essential one, and one that we may not neglect altogether.

Elaborate scenic effects had been familiar on the English stage for centuries. By the beginning of the nineteenth, the complaint that scenery was ruinous to dramatic invention had already become a critical commonplace. So it was even at the beginning of the eighteenth. Addison, for instance, deplored the use of bells, and of thunder and lightning, which were often "made use of at the descending of a god or the rising of a ghost, at the vanishing of a devil or at the death of a tyrant.[1] There is nothing," he continued, "which delights and terrifies our English audience so much as a ghost, especially when he appears in a bloody shirt. A spectre has very often saved a play . . . without speaking one word."

While Addison rebuked and ridiculed such tendencies, with his usual good sense he made it clear that he did "not find fault with artifices . . . when they are introduced with skill and accompanied by proportionable sentiments and expressions in writing."

This passage from Addison might well serve as our text in the present chapter. The trend of the changes in scenic illusion during our period was away from mere splendor and sensation toward appropriateness and nature. Could we have seen a drama decked out by Kemble, and then one on the stage of Boucicault, Fechter, or the Bancrofts, we should have been forced to admit, whatever our theories, that during these sixty years a great change in scenic effect was brought about in the interests of better dramatic art. Our present business is to follow that change.

Certainly the scene-painter's craft was far from a contemptible one at any time we are to consider. The *Times* for May 25, 1799, says of the Drury Lane production of *Pizarro:* "[The] pavilion and the Temple of the Sun are equal in point of brilliant effect to the best scenes of any of our theatres; and the machinery, decorations, and dresses were marked with appropriate taste and splendor." Leigh Hunt was first drawn to the theatre by the scenic fascination. "The first time I ever saw a

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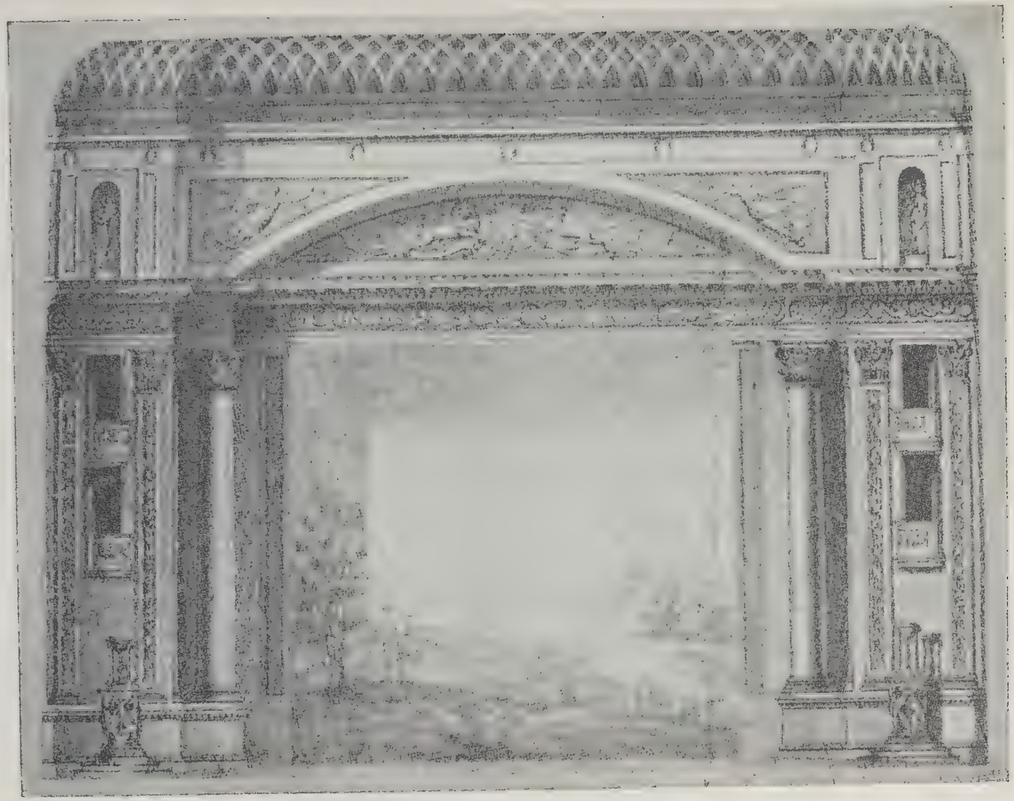
[1] *Spectator*, no. 44.



Proscenium of the New Drury Lane Theatre of 1812

From the architect's drawings, Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library

play," he tells us, "was in March, 1800; . . . the scenery enchanted me, and I went home with a hearty jollity of Mr. Bannister laughing all the way before me." He particularizes concerning one of John Kemble's scenes, which represented a study. "It was adorned with the most natural literary disorder possible: . . . globes, library furniture, everything had its use and effect, for an audience . . . is always pleased with a natural scene."[1]

It is easy and tempting, from such statements as these, to jump to the conclusion that scenic effect had already reached a stage of realistic accuracy. Only by considering subsequent development can we guard against this error. Every generation that we are to review made astonishing advances over the generation preceding it. By 1800 the English stage had by no means approached its goal of realistic illustration.

With the coming of de Loutherbourg to England in 1770,[2] stage art in the modern sense may be said to have begun north of the Channel. He found in the British scene a mere flat, and he introduced what were later called "set scenes" and "raking-pieces." Besides, he introduced transparent scenes, with representations of moonlight, sunshine, firelight, volcanoes, and also silk screens before the foot- and side-lights, to help in coloring the stage. He also made use, for the first time in England, of gauzes between the scene and the spectators.

He was the first of a long line of scenic artists in the modern style, who were to revolutionize the British stage, substituting for mere glitter and magnificence, scenery which created a pleasing illusion appropriate to the plays it illustrated. Among the best known of these painters were Roberts, Stanfield, Grieve, Telbin, Beverley, Calcott, Craven, and O'Connor.

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[1] *Critical Essays*, 1807.

[2] See Dutton Cook, *A Book of the Play*, p. 139. Garrick's *Christmas Tale* is said to have been the first production in which de Loutherbourg's scenery was used. See Sichel's *Sheridan*, Vol. I, p. 531.

It was not long before the magnificence introduced by de Loutherbourg at the majors spread also to the minors. The minors, indeed, may be said to have contributed two of the most characteristic of spectacular effects — horses and water. Horses — a whole cavalry troupe of them — were exhibited even by Kemble at Covent Garden in 1811, most certainly as the result of competition with such circus theatres as the Surrey, the Olympic, and Astley's Amphitheatre. Water, of course, was no new means of stage sensation. Addison a hundred years before had lamented in a memorable criticism that there was nothing so pitifully unreal as real water flowing through a piece of painted cloth. After 1804, however, water was introduced not merely to make a painted landscape look a little more unreal, but as an important participant in the action. This banal innovation was made by the managers of Sadler's Wells, who availed themselves of a convenient water-supply to fill a huge tank which was constructed under their stage. By means of ropes the stage itself could be lifted to the ceiling so as to leave the tank open for sensation or spectacle. The *Siege of Gibraltar*, given here April 2, 1804, was the beginning of tank spectacles. The rage did not take possession of the major theatres until 1823, when Elliston, at the expense of £5,000, produced at Drury Lane the melodramatic spectacle *The Cataract of the Ganges*. This production was generally admitted to be the greatest "tank drama." The *British Press*,[1] commenting on this production, said:

> It does infinite credit to Mr. Wallack, the getter-up, but none at all to the author,[2] for all its attraction consists in the new scenery, splendid decorations, and, above all, in the stud of horses and a car drawn by six additional ones. The scenery is certainly of the most beautiful description, superior to anything we have ever before witnessed; and the real horses and real water completely establish the success of the piece. It was

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[1] Quoted in *Theat. Obs.*, no. 602, Oct. 28, 1823.

[2] Moncrieff.

given out by Mr. Wallack for repetition this evening amid thunders of applause which prevented his speaking for many minutes.

The *Theatrical Observer* was only half-hearted in its praise:

> We recollect the time when everybody who had a peculiar fancy for seeing water exhibited within the walls of a theatre was obliged to make an excursion to Sadler's Wells, and that between the months of March and October; but many changes have taken place since that time; and we see real water rolling down a stair-case in November, and we have a complete shower-bath at the Coburg at Christmas. This must be allowed to be the most striking improvement upon all exhibitions of the same nature that have preceded it. The scene represents a marine grotto and the water descending in a lucid sheet as if it were a complete transparent curtain.[1]

The Adelphi was not slow in appropriating the same devices for its melodramas. In a description of a "burletta" called *Sampson the Sergeant*, given there in 1828, we read how a girl's father dragged her to a cascade in which, while attempting to drown her, he is all but drowned himself. At the point of death he is magnanimously saved by the girl's lover.[2]

Fortunately the popularity of such effects passes quickly. We read comparatively little of them during the next few generations. Even when attempted, they were not wholly successful, except as they were used in connection with plays which in themselves had merit. An interesting case of failure was that of Fitzball's *Nicrotis*, produced by the showman, E. T. Smith, at Drury Lane in 1855.[3] This was one of the boldest water dramas produced in the entire period, and it failed miserably. Professor Morley commented as follows:

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, Jan. 21, 1824.

[2] *Ibid.*, 2133, Oct. 11, 1828.

[3] *Ibid.*, Oct. 9, 1855.

> In spite . . . of a great outlay, on a striking stage effect, representing the rush of the Nile into a grotto and the drowning of the conspirators, in spite of all the gods of Egypt carried in procession through the length of a whole act, the "gods" of Drury Lane inexorably hissed. [He further remarked]: The success of spectacle in these days is no doubt an obvious fact, but successful spectacles, it is not less certain, have generally been associated with some matter that the public thought worth hearing.[1]

There were, of course, many other aids to sensation and spectacle, such as Planché's "vampire trap" introduced at the Lyceum (the English Opera House) in 1820,[2] a device which has probably appeared in every Christmas pantomine since that date. Another source of stage effect was the diorama, or changing scenes, exhibited in various parts of London.[3] Of this Pückler-Muskau says in a letter dated December 23, 1826: "It is certainly impossible to deceive the senses more effectually; even with the certitude of illusion, one can hardly persuade oneself that it does not exist."[4] There can be little doubt that stage illusion under Clarkson Stanfield, who was the chief artist of the diorama, reached a very high state of perfection in this species of stage effect. It was he who designed the scenery for the *Cataract of the Ganges*, and he, too, supplied Macready with many of the best scenes for the brilliant Shakespearean "revivals" for which that great actor-manager is famed.

Pückler-Muskau has left us a number of word-sketches of London scenery in the decade of the eighteen-twenties, which enable us to imagine our way back to the condition of the stage as seen by a contemporary audience. In the production of *Oberon*, he describes a typical operatic set:

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[1] *Journal of a London Playgoer*, Oct. 13, 1855.

[2] See Planché's *Recollections and Reflections*, i, 40.

[3] See Appendix I.

[4] *Travels of a German Prince*, iii, Letter 7.

> Huge rocky caves which occupy the whole stage; every mass of rock then suddenly changes into some fantastic and frightful form of face, gleaming with many-colored flames and lurid light, out of which, here and there, a whole figure leans grinning forward, while the fearful thrilling music reëchoes from every side from the moving chorus of rocks.[1]

Even more instructive is his description of a Covent Garden pantomime.

> At the rising of the curtain a thick mist covers the stage and gradually rolls off. This is remarkably well managed by means of fine gauze. In the dim light we distinguish a little cottage, the dwelling of a sorceress; in the background a lake surrounded by mountains, some of whose peaks are clothed with snow. All as yet is misty and indistinct; the sun then rises triumphantly, chases the morning dews, and the hut with the village in the distance now appears in perfect outline. And now you behold upon the roof a large cock which flaps his wings, plumes himself, stretches his neck, and greets the sun with several very natural *kikerikys*. A magpie near him begins to chatter and strut about and to peck at a gigantic tom-cat, lying in a niche in the wall, who sleepily stretches himself, cleans his face, and purrs most complacently. . . . Happily the scenic art is come to that, that it no longer suffers men to be excelled by poodles and monkeys, but has actually raised them to the power of representing those admired animals to the life.[2]

Such instances might be multiplied indefinitely. Of similar completeness were the spectacles of *Bonaparte* at Covent Garden in 1831, of Rossini's *Siege of Corinth* at Drury Lane in 1836 (scenes designed by Grieve), of Byron's *Sardanapalus*, picturing the destruction of Nineveh, produced in 1834, of *The Last Days of Pompeii* at the Victoria in 1834, and of countless others. Often they were given merely for their attractiveness as spectacle, but nearly as often as a fitting background for a play of literary merit — generally Shakespeare's.

[1] *Travels of a German Prince*, iii, Letter 4.

[2] *Ibid.*, Letter 10.

There was, in all this, endless competition. Every manager who ventured upon stage spectacles tried to outdo all in that kind that had preceded. Macready, for instance, in 1838 introduced the opening ship scene in *The Tempest*. We are told that the "tempest with a vessel floundering was fearfully true to nature and was hailed with shouts of applause."[1]

When the play was revived by Charles Kemble at Covent Garden in 1842, we read that it left "Macready's production in the shade," and that a ship was actually introduced for the first scene as indicated by Shakespeare and was "managed with consummate skill." Vestris and Mathews were not to be outdone. When, in 1852, they had occasion to repeat this effect at the Lyceum in Lewes's *Chain of Events*,[2] they apparently went much further than either Macready or Kemble. Coleman declares that it has "never since been equalled."[3] The *Theatrical Journal* said of it:

> We may point to the storm at sea, with a ship tossed on the waves, as one of the most complete pieces of stage machinery we have ever seen. The vessel, a regularly built model, appeared rolling in the trough of the sea and showing alternately either side to the audience, until she struck heavily on a rock. The sinking of the ship was capitally managed. The water seemed to close over her as she sank and in a moment there was nothing to be seen but a few poor wretches apparently struggling for life in the waves.[4]

If, then, the English stage at the beginning of the century was scenically brilliant, by 1860 it was vastly more so. Considered merely as spectacle, scenic art had advanced from mere brilliancy and pomp to a very high degree of appropriateness and realism, and had become exceedingly pliant for the expression of any conception of a dramatist, however elaborate. It must not be supposed, however, that the stage always maintained these standards of excellence. At no time did the Haymarket concern itself much with this branch of dramatic art. In 1846, for instance, during Charlotte Cushman's engagement at that theatre, we are told that her play was put on with "commonplace and in some scenes most despicable setting." [1] Rarely do we read of any marked effect produced there by stage machinery. Such houses, however, as those conducted by Vestris, Macready, Phelps, and Charles Kean, maintained a very high standard of scenic effect.

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, no. 5248, Oct. 15, 1838. Baker is manifestly wrong in calling the Vestris ship scene in the *Chain of Events* the first of this kind. See Baker, p. 290.

[2] Translated from *Les Dames de la Halle*.

[3] *Plays and Playwrights I have Known*, i, 18.

[4] *Theat. Jour.*, April 20, 1852.

As this movement toward scenic vividness proceeded, it was supplemented by another, — more important or less so according to one's dramatic taste, — namely, the pursuit of scholarly accuracy. By general consent John Kemble has been regarded as the pioneer in scenic pedantry.[2] As we have noted, it was his aim to revolutionize Shakespearean staging by making it correct both textually and scenically. He consulted Shakespearean critics like Malone, Stevens, and Reed. His artist, Capon, professed antiquarian tendencies. "To be critically exact," Boaden says, "was the great ambition of his life."

Even to have this ambition was to make a great advance upon the days of Garrick when Barry played *Othello* "in a complete suit of English regimentals, and a three-cocked, gold-laced hat! . . . and Thomas Sheridan in *Macbeth* dressed in scarlet-and-gold English uniform." [3] It would seem, however, that with all his scholarly pretentiousness, Kemble attained to only a limited degree of historical accuracy; and this appeared more in costuming than in scenery. Macready, in characterizing his own work, at least, made that distinction when he said:

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, Dec. 5, 1846.

[2] *Quarterly Review*, vol. xxxiv, 1826; a review of Boaden's *Life of Kemble.*

[3] O'Keefe's *Memoirs*, xi, 110.

> Except in regard to a valuable change made in its costuming by that great artist whose name I can never remember without admiration and respect, John Kemble, the drama was stationary. Its stage arrangements remained traditional, defended from innovation in each succeeding age by the name and authority of the leading actor who had gone before.[1]

How Macready's scenery had improved upon Kemble's is made clear by Forster.[2] He speaks in particular of Macready's *Coriolanus*, in which the action was illustrated as accurately as possible in such an early Rome as that of the hero, and, unlike Kemble's, was not represented in the late city of Rome, with its arch of Constantine, the Coliseum, and the Pillar of Trajan. Even in matters pertaining to costume, Kemble was far from scholarly accuracy. Genest, who is inclined to regard Kemble as a pedantic pretender, cites as examples of his inaccuracy the elephant suspended upon a blue ribbon, which he wore about his neck in *Hamlet*, and also the garter which he wore in the character of Hotspur, although the latter was known not to have belonged to the Order.[3]

There is little reason, however, for denying Kemble the full honors of scholarly reform. If he failed in any particular, it was rather because of misinformation than because he was a charlatan. With all these mistakes, his scenery and costuming must have added not a little to the histrionic values of Shakespeare's plays, which hitherto had been produced only in settings that were insincere and inappropriate.

There can be no doubt, however, that he left much for coming generations to improve,[4] and they availed themselves of the opportunity. The first to interest himself seriously in this progress was the antiquarian and dramatic author, J. R. Planché. In 1823, he tells us,[1] he made the suggestion of a really historical study of costumes and scenery to Charles Kemble, then the lessee of Covent Garden. Kemble saw in it the opportunity for a fresh popular appeal and encouraged Planché in carrying out the necessary research. The result was the Covent Garden production of *King John* in 1823. It was announced that the play would be given "with an attention to costume never before equalled on the English stage. Every character will appear in the precise habit of the period; the whole of the decoration and dresses being executed from indisputable authorities, such as, monumental effigies, seals, illuminated manuscripts, etc." [2]

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[1] *Diaries*, July 20, 1839. Speech at Free Masons' Tavern.

[2] *Examiner*, March 18, 1838.

[3] Genest, viii, 616.

[4] Leigh Hunt's comment in *Critical Essays*, 1807, is suggestive: "Perhaps there is not a single performer who knows how to dress with perfect propriety, except Mrs. Siddons, who is excellently classical and just in this respect."

There can be little doubt that the immediate impulse given to Macready and Charles Kean in their revivals came rather from Planché's study than from the earlier innovations of Kemble. Kemble's "accuracy" was not maintained after his retirement. Planché tells us that all the theatres discouraged Kemble's attempts, especially manager Fawcett, not because the drama should not be well costumed, but because "if it were," they wondered, "what would become of their pantomimes!"

King John in the new fashion was most successful, but the practice thus introduced was not widely followed, certainly not outside of Covent Garden. A letter in Leigh Hunt's *Tatler*,[3] as late as 1832, pictures the condition of costuming as still very bad. Minerva wore a tin helmet and carried a shield without the Gorgon's head; Juno looked and dressed "more like a roasting cook than anything else"; Momus appeared in "habiliments of a modern pantaloon"; Bacchus was represented "as a rawboned, rough-muzzled carle." Kean, it was said, dressed Othello in a garb rather of an Albanian Greek than of a Moor, and went through the battle in *Richard III* without armor. Young, playing Macbeth in a green velvet jacket, carried a shield until he began to fight, and then threw it away. As we have already noted, the financial state of the theatres in 1832 was so bad as to prohibit expensive costumes and scenery, except for the annual pantomime!

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[1] *Recollections and Reflections*, i, 52.

[2] The bill for Dec. 8, 1823, as reported in *Theat. Obs.*

[3] May 25, 1832.

Into this state of affairs Macready's managements at the major theatres, and Madame Vestris's at the Olympic and Covent Garden, came as revolutionary impulses. Of Macready's *Macbeth*, in 1837, the *Observer* feelingly remarked, "The tragedy was got up with every proper attention as to scenery, dresses, and decorations. The theatre is no longer disgraced by the exhibition of scenery which would not at the present day be tolerated in a barn."

Not only did Macready impart a degree of respectability to the scenery and costumes, but he did all in his power to make them at the same time artistic and historically correct. By this time Planché had published his *Costumes for King John, etc.*, and also his *History of British Costume*. These were, no doubt, of much assistance to Macready. Furthermore that actor possessed a more genuinely scholarly spirit than that of Kemble, who in *Coriolanus* had preferred to represent the Rome of the Cæsars instead of that of the Republic, for fear of being thought too pedantic. Of Macready's production, Forster, his friend and admirer, but discriminating critic, declared: "It was the worthiest tribute to the genius and fame of Shakespeare that has been yet attempted on the English stage." Comparing it with previous efforts of the sort he says:

> Every attempt at a stage triumph we happen to have seen before, compared with this, was as the gilt gingerbread of a

lord mayor's show — the gorgeous tinsel of an ill-imitated grandeur. This was the grandeur itself, the rudeness and simplicity, the glory and the truth of life.

Although this opinion was from a prejudiced source, it did not exceed the praise which Macready's effects invariably called forth from the press. Of his *Joan of Arc* we read:

> As a spectacle this piece equals anything ever produced on our stage. The storming of the city of Orleans, the coronation of the king, the capture of Joan, and her death, are, each and all of them, highly effective and beautiful, and were hailed with enthusiastic shouts of applause.[1]

Macready was seconded in his labors by the generous coöperation of the great scene painter Stanfield, who, more than once, gave his services to help the actor out of financial difficulties. The spirit in which he and Macready worked was that of self-sacrifice — it could, indeed, have been nothing else. Their best efforts were not generously supported by the public.

While it is true, as often stated, that the productions of Phelps at Sadler's Wells were inferior to those of Macready and of Charles Kean in point of setting, it is certainly not true that they were shabbily inadequate. He was assisted by the very competent scenic artist Fenton, and his productions were characterized by that careful fitness and subordination of stage effect to the text which alone makes stage pageantry endurable. Professor Morley, in describing the appointments of his production of *Pericles*, gives us a fair idea of his methods.

> Of the scenery [he writes] indeed it is to be said that so much splendour of decoration is rarely governed by so pure a taste. The play, of which the text is instability of fortune, has its characteristic place of action on the sea. Pericles is perpetually shown (literally as well as metaphorically) tempest-

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, no. 4976, Nov. 29, 1837.

tost, or in the immediate vicinity of the treacherous waters; and this idea is most happily enforced at Sadler's Wells by scene painter and machinist. They reproduce the rolling of the billows and the whistling of the winds when Pericles lies senseless, a wrecked man on the shore. When he is shown on board ship in the storm during the birth of Marina, the ship tosses vigorously. When he sails at last to the temple of Diana of the Ephesians, rowers take their places on the banks, the vessel seems to glide along the coast, an admirably painted panorama slides before the eye, and the whole theatre seems to be in the course of actual transportation to the temple at Ephesus which is the crowning scenic glory of the play. The dresses too are brilliant. As beseems an eastern story, the events all pass among princes. Now the spectator has a scene presented to him, occupied by characters who appear to have stepped out of a Greek vase; and presently he looks into an Assyrian palace and sees figures which have come to life and color from the stones of Nineveh. There are noble banquets and glittering processions, and in the banquet hall of King Simonides, there is a dance which is a marvel of glitter, combinations of color, and quaint picturesque effects. There are splendid trains of courtiers, there are shining rows of vestal virgins, and there is Diana herself in the sky.[1]

This description would indicate that Phelps left little to be desired in the presentation of the play of *Pericles*. Perhaps this was considerably more elaborate than the average Sadler's Wells revival, but it makes it clear that Phelps's staging was in all respects adequate and often appropriate and picturesque.

What the famous revivals of Charles Kean at the Princess's added to this already highly developed scenic representation was in degree rather than kind. His biographer Cole rightly declared: "The time had at length arrived when a total purification of Shakespeare with every accompaniment that refined knowledge . . . could supply, was suited to the taste and temper of the age, which had become eminently pictorial and exacting beyond all former precedent."

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[1] *Journal of a London Playgoer*, Sept. 21, 1854.

There were many who wished that Kean had depended upon simpler stage effects and many more who would deny him greatness in any department except that of the scenery and costume. All were agreed, however, that never before had the English stage seen such brilliant, picturesque, and appropriate setting. To characterize his work in the words of contemporaries is but to repeat superlatives. Of his *Winter's Tale* Coleman declared: "It was the most gorgeous and brilliant spectacle that I have ever seen"; and of his *Corsican Brothers*, "It has not since been eclipsed, not even by Mr. Irving's recent splendid and artistic production." John Oxenford, dramatic critic of the *Times*, said of his *Henry VIII*, "We will run the risk of exaggeration by declaring in most unequivocal terms, that *Henry VIII*, as produced at the Princess's Theatre is the most wonderful spectacle that has ever been seen on the London stage." "For correctness and gorgeous display," the *Theatrical Journal* pronounced it "equal to the time of Harry VIII himself"; and proceeded to exclaim: "What can we say sufficiently to praise the stage arrangements and appointments which, like all the rest, came under the immediate superintendence of Mr. Charles Kean, who should henceforth be denominated the Prince of Managers? They are perfect, more perfect than we have ever beheld them." Describing the scene of the vision, the writer declares: "The appearance of the angels in the dream of Queen Catherine, if not coming too near to spiritual manifestation, is full of ethereal grandeur and has a most impressive effect upon the audience, who, while this scene is enacted, sit like statues, as though divinity indeed were arrayed before them." [1]

Similar was the praise even of his enemies, and many there were. One quotation from *Punch* will suffice to give their point of view, which remained the same in all their arraignment. They hated Kean because of his espousal of French methods and French plays, and because of his fondness for pomp which, they believed, superseded true dramatic effect. Cole in an appendix prints a large collection of such comment. It is characterized by a facetious and vindictive tone which, without rendering the appraisal false, at least makes it unfair. Many of the passages, too, are from such writers as Jerrold or Lewes, who were inspired by strong personal resentment. The following may serve as an example:

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[1] *Theat. Jour.*, June 6, 1855.

> The *Faust and Marguerite* at the Princess's shows Mr. Charles Kean to be a born spectacle maker. . . . Wonderful is the process by which all the poetry, all the grandeur, is discharged from Goethe, the imagination and subtleties of the master being supplied by the pulleys of the machinist and the colors of the scene painter! Everything of life and beauty has been extracted, and the *caput mortuum* — that is, Charles Kean's Mephistopheles — remains. . . .
>
> Some of the scenic effects are very beautiful and worthy of the Princess's as a gallery of illustration. The vision of Marguerite (thanks to Marguerite herself) was very lovely; and the procession to the cathedral showed that the manager had been a profound observer of the condition and demeanor of people going to prayers. The sprinkling of babies was very judicious and a little touching.
>
> The musical contest of the soul of Marguerite between the demons under the stage and the angels over it was somewhat bold upon a moral English public; but when the soul of Marguerite in white muslin, borne by angels in satin petticoats was carried to heaven ("without wires," cried a critic hysterical with admiration) the delight of the "gods" was perfect.

In all such comment it is difficult to discriminate between animosity for the French art — for *Faust and Marguerite* was an adaptation from the Porte Saint Martin — and the sincere criticism of Kean's methods of production. It would seem hardly likely that his work could have been as meretricious as such criticisms imply. On the other hand, it is clear that scenic display was allowed to outdistance genuine effect. With an actor like Kean it could hardly have been otherwise.

Kean, nevertheless, did not very greatly increase the facilities of the stage beyond those of Macready and Phelps. We read, to be sure, of invisible wires, and learn that "Mr. Charles Kean has shown us how, by the aid of electric light, both sun and moon are to be almost sublimely represented,"[1] but he seems not to have altered the general lighting effects or the old methods of setting. Here again we are reminded of the necessity of employing a sliding scale as a standard of judgment. Those who wrote of Kean's achievements while they were actually before them could hardly find superlatives enough to express their enthusiasm; and yet Darbyshire, who was himself an ardent admirer of Kean's methods, owns that he is "astonished when . . . [he reviews] the progress made, and . . . the development of the resources of the theatre since that time."[2]

We may, nevertheless, regard Kean's stage effects as the highest attainment during our period in the movement started by John Kemble and reinvigorated by Planché, Charles Kemble, and Macready. Its aim had been to give the plays of Shakespeare not only with every attraction of appropriate and picturesque scenery, but with a scholarly precision which would make the ages conjured up by the poet's fancy live again before the London public. Whatever may be said against Kean's principles in favor of a return to Elizabethan simplicity, we must admit that, if scenic effect is to be employed at all, it is better to have it carefully and appropriately contrived, than, as was certainly the case before John Kemble's time, slovenly in execution and wholly without fitness.

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[1] *Theat. Jour.*, Feb. 23, 1859.

[2] Alfred Darbyshire, *Art of the Victorian Stage*, p. 11.

In the meantime, a vastly more important movement in scenic effect had been set on foot. If the staging of tragedy had been absurd, the staging of comedy was more so. It had been taken for granted that characters in comedy should dress and act in the most exaggerated fashion as a legitimate part of the comic effect. The vast size of the theatres had no doubt increased this tendency. Leigh Hunt, in his *Critical Essays*, makes the sweeping assertion, for both tragedy and comedy, that "perhaps there is not a single performer who knows how to dress with perfect propriety except Mrs. Siddons, who is excellently classical and just in this respect. Mr. Elliston, Mr. Kemble, and his brother Charles are more attentive to their apparel than the generality of actors."

A German by the name of Goede, who visited London in 1821, published the following account of the costumes in comedy:

> You will never behold foreign actors dressed in such an absurd style as upon the London stage. The English of all other nations, the most superstitious worshippers of fashion, are, nevertheless, accustomed to manifest a strange indulgence for the incivilities which this goddess encounters from their performers. I have seen Mr. Cooke personating the character of Sir Pertinax McSycophant, in *The Man of the World* in a buff coat of antique cut and embroidered waistcoat, which might have figured in the courts of Charles II; although this play is of modern date and the actor must, of course, have been familiar with the correct costume. In *The Way to Keep Him*, Mr. C. Kemble acted the part of Sir Brilliant Fashion, a name which ought to have suggested to him a proper style of dress, in a frock absolutely threadbare, an obsolete doublet, long pantaloons, a prodigious watch-chain of steel and a huge *incroyable* under his arm. This last article, indeed, was an appendage of 1802, but all the rest presented a genuine portrait of an indigent and coxcomical journeyman tailor. . . . [He would not] I am perfectly convinced, parade in such a costume off the boards of a theatre. Why then should he choose

to exhibit such a whimsical figure upon them? May I venture to offer my own conjecture upon the subject? The real cause probably is that an absurd costume is perfectly fashionable upon the English stage.[1]

This was, indeed, the true explanation. The fashion, too, was of long standing. A writer as early as 1759 had timidly suggested propriety in dress, but doubted that the reform would be "well received by audiences who had been so long habituated to such glaring improprieties and negligence." [2]

A certain marked type of dress went with each type of comic character. Anything else was considered heretical. When one recalls the nature of early-century audiences, their insistence upon tradition and their whimsical resentment of anything new, the reason for the absurdities in attire is apparent.

Take, for instance, the manner of costuming the light comedian. Mathews says he was marked by "a claret-colored coat, salmon-colored trousers with a black broad stripe, a sky-blue neckcloth with a large paste broach, and a cut steel eyeglass with pink ribbon."[3] Similar is Robertson's description in the *Lounger:* "A boistrous blatant fellow in a green coat and brass buttons, buckskin breeches and boots, or in a blue frock, white waistcoat, and straw-colored continuations, always talking at the top of his voice." [4]

It was of prime importance that such a condition of affairs should be changed before anything pretending to be realistic comedy in a modern sense could be attempted on the English stage. It was one of the strange inconsistencies of the day that the change should be first accomplished in burlesque. Like so many other improvements, it was effected at the Olympic under the management of Madame Vestris. Planché, her author, claims the honor of the suggestion. At first her company and she herself were opposed to the change, for it was feared that, to the London public, burlesque would no longer appeal without the absurdities of former days. Liston, we are told, even to the end protested that his humor would be more appealing if he were allowed to dress as formerly. Planché's theory was that the absurdities of burlesque would be greatly heightened if they were delivered by people in perfectly normal and natural costumes and environment. His counsel prevailed and was put into effect at the very outset of Madame Vestris's management in the production of Planché's *Olympic Revels*. The audience, it seems, appreciated the change, and it at once became the fixed policy of Madame Vestris's burlesque staging. At first her scenic realism went little beyond costuming. Planché states that "the scenery of the *Revels* had been limited to a few clouds, the interior of a cottage and a well-used modern London street, which was made a joke of in the bill to anticipate criticism."[1]

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[1] Quoted by E. Dutton Cook in *A Book of the Play*, p. 351.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Mathews's *Autobiography*, quoted in *Life and Writings of T. W. Robertson*, p. 353.

[4] Selections reprinted in *Life and Writings of T. W. Robertson.*

Improvements were made as success attended Vestris's efforts. In the *Olympic Devils* the scenery had been greatly bettered. There was "a most infernal Tartarus, a very gloomy Styx, and a really beautiful Greek landscape with the portico of the temple of Bacchus, the columns of which joined in the general dance, 'when Orpheus with his lute made tree,' etc., to the great delight of the audience."

When Mathews joined the company, — marrying the seductive manageress, — he professed himself thoroughly in sympathy with her insistence upon appropriate costumes and scenery. He at once discarded the traditional light-comedy costume. The claret-colored coat and salmon-colored trousers, the cut steel eyeglass and pink ribbon, he tells us, "no longer marked the light comedy gentleman and the public at once recognized and appreciated the change."

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[1] *Recollections and Reflections*, p. 190.

The Planché influence made itself felt in every detail. In order to make the production of *Court Beauties* perfect in point of setting and costume, he obtained special permission to consult the paintings in Hampton Court, and purchased for the occasion a large number of King Charles spaniels at £70 a pair. His interiors were planned with particular exactness. In the queen's room, designed for the play of *Mary Queen of Scots*, for instance, the interior of Lochleven Castle was carefully reproduced, with furniture made of genuine carved oak and marked with the arms of the Stuarts. The old custom of setting all interiors with little or no furniture — and that absurdly inappropriate — was thus superseded. Elaborate sets of a modern type were rapidly developed. Not only at the Olympic were these introduced, but at the majors as well. Planché's *Minister and Mercer*,[1] given at Drury Lane,[2] was a striking example. The setting was both elaborate and modern. The *Theatrical Observer* gives a detailed account of the innovation on the major boards.

> One of the scenes was most beautiful. The stage was entirely closed and represented a saloon with rich carved and gilded cornices, a beautifully painted plafond, and lighted by an immense sky-light; this was truly a royal apartment and when the folding doors were thrown open, a suite of rooms was discovered beyond unequalled in extent even by the ballrooms in *Gustavus*.[3] The costumes were rich and appropriate and the whole mise-en-scène was in the best possible taste.[4]

There seem to have been no notable scenic improvements in Bulwer's *Money* as produced at the Haymarket in 1840. I have seen no comment on that celebrated comedy that indicated novelty of scenery or costumes. It was probably mounted in the style of all the Haymarket comedies, with little attention to such matters. It remained, rather, for Vestris and Mathews again to set the fashion for all succeeding managements. This they did in most lavish fashion when Boucicault's *London Assurance* was presented during their management of Covent Garden in 1841. How these innovations appeared to an observer who had followed the developments for several decades on the London stage, we may learn from the following review in Thomas's *Theatrical Observer.*[1]

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[1] Translation from Scribe.

[2] Feb. 8, 1834.

[3] Probably a spectacle that had recently been popular.

[4] No. 3791, Feb. 10, 1834.

> [As to the] style of the production, it is impossible adequately to convey an idea of its superlative grandeur. There are but four scenes, one to each act, except the fifth, which is the same as the fourth; but the Squire's house, opening on to a green lawn, the drawing-room so magnificently furnished, with the most costly articles of decoration — not state properties, but *bona fide* realities — were such as were never before seen beyond the pale of fashionable life, and could only have been imitated by one used to that society.

This was probably the first appearance on the British stage of a genuine modern comedy set. It was of little consequence whether it was to be excelled in point of completeness or elegance by later managements. It was a revelation to its own age, and it set the example for all that were to follow. Vestris herself, in the Lyceum management, undoubtedly improved upon it, although her reputation and her gifts as an actress at that late period destined her principally to the field of burlesque.

At the Princess's under Kean we know that such scenes were exhibited in the many modern plays adapted from the French. Cole,[2] for instance, speaking of the production of the *Lancers*, from Monsieur Bayard's *Fils de Famille,* declares: "Nothing could be more complete than a

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[1] No. 5991, March 5, 1841.

[2] *Life and Theatrical Times of Charles Kean*, ii, 95.

fac simile of a modern drawing-room which was presented in the second act on a stage principally filled by subordinate actors."

Thus we have seen both of the chief lines of scenic development — one for the romantic and poetic drama, the other for the comedy of real life — proceed side by side from a condition of the wildest possible extravagances in both tragedy and comedy to a high degree of sanity and histrionic fidelity. Changes and vast improvements have been made since. The significant revolution in such respects, however, had taken place long before 1850, and those who have since added to these accomplishments can, in no sense of the word, claim the distinction of innovators except in minor details. The principle of realism had been fought for and the conflict had been decided long before Boucicault or the Bancrofts. The English public had unmistakably shown their pleasure in comedy that was not only acted with a degree of realism but also staged and costumed in the same spirit.

What the effect of such changes was upon the art of the playwright it is more difficult to determine. Many other influences were at the same time brought to bear upon him, such as the popularity of the French art and the vogue of sensation. It is certain, however, that the taste for up-to-date comedy sets introduced by the Vestris production of *London Assurance*, and by hundreds of similar ones from the French, must have done more than anything else to remove from the English stage the old type of comedy, in which was reflected not only the spirit of the ancient English comedy writers, but their stage devices, the costuming of their times, and even their comic types. These changes in the mere externals of acted drama did much more than is generally supposed to bring about that revolution in stagecraft which made Robertson and his school not only possible but inevitable.

It would, however, be a mistake to suppose that perfection had been reached by 1860, or that the older methods of production had entirely died out. The new itself was still colored by the old. There was much of extravagance and absurdity in the highest attainments of the realistic art. The machinery and appointments were even then thought absurd. In the *Theatrical Journal*, beginning February 6, 1859, is reported an elaborate discussion of the failings in the scenic effects observable on the London stage. The writer of the review, introducing the controversy, made the following charges and recommendations:

1. Actors can be seen standing in the wings.
2. Forest scenes often terminate in a dirty brick wall.
3. During the action of the exit "the castle wall or the old oak chamber will walk off the stage discovering to the side, pit, gallery, and boxes, the framework of the chalked canvas scene."
4. In a field scene the bare boards of the stage are discovered.
5. There should be a proscenium to shield the edges of the stage from the gaze of the spectators.
6. The footlights should be concealed.
7. There should be only one scene in an act. Much more natural effects could then be obtained in the theatres than are now possible.
8. On the death of any hero "the gentlemen in the orchestra should not be discovered slowly fiddling, but a violinist should be kept for the purpose concealed in the wings."

These sweeping accusations brought from numerous correspondents a storm of refutation. B. W. Watkins, a contributor of long standing, declared that only at the extreme sides were such untoward sights observable as the critic maintained, but he admitted that "a sort of proscenium should be constructed to shield the stage." His comment upon the proposal of one scene to an act is interesting as indicative of the contemporary point of view: "Your correspondent's proposal that there should be only one scene to the act is simply ridiculous, and I cannot see how such a very strict task upon the dramatist's brain, and upon the audience's also, would go better to consummate nature in the playhouse."

Another contributor denied that at "any respectable house" such things could be seen, and facetiously asked, "if he would have the candle-snuffing age introduced again, when it was absolutely necessary for the stage to be covered with the venerable green baize carpet ere a tragedy could be represented."

The original writer replied to these hostile contributors, confining his attention chiefly to his one-scene-to-an-act theory. His statements are valuable particularly as they indicate that scene-shifting within an act was sometimes carried on without lowering the curtain or otherwise obscuring the stage; for he says, "No illusion could be natural if, as I have pointed out in my previous letter, the scenery were to be shifted to and fro on the stage as it is now before the eyes of the audience."

Old Watkins wielded a decisive blow: "The one-scene-to-an-act theory is but a ridiculous and atrabilarian one without containing the least sparkle of wit or common sense, or practicability either."

Such comment as this shows that scenic effect was not, as yet, without glaring defects. The scenery ill concealed its artificiality or, indeed, the naked walls and stage against which it was set. The sides of the stage, in particular, were faulty. The change of scenery during an act, it appears, was sometimes done before the audience, and the effect of the footlights was unnatural in the extreme. There was still much to be done before scenic illusion of a modern realistic type would be possible on the London stage.

Fechter was the next manager to make any considerable departure in scenic realism. Baker tells us that he abolished

> the ancient grooves, trap-doors, and sticky flats, and had his flooring so constructed that it could be taken to pieces like a child's puzzle, scenery could be raised or sunk bodily, and all the shifting was done upon the mezzanine stage beneath. Ceilings were no longer represented by hanging cloths, and the walls of a room by open wings, but were solidly built; the old glaring floats [footlights] which used to make such hideous lights and shadows on the faces of the performers were sunk and subdued, and set scene succeeded set scene with a rapidity which, in those days, when seldom more than one set was attempted in each act, was regarded as marvellous.[1]

In *Hamlet* Fechter went still further in the direction of correct costuming and staging than any of his predecessors. Among the changes recorded in the *Times*[2] were: "massive architecture of the Norman style and the dresses of the mediæval period. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are no longer attired in the conventional costumes vaguely associated with the courtiers of Spain and Italy, but are dressed like northern warriors." Fechter himself assumed the blond hair of the Danish race.

As we have already observed, in other respects there remained comparatively little for the Bancrofts to accomplish in scenic realism. It does not, indeed, appear that the few changes of the sort which they made before 1870 were in any sense revolutionary. Many statements made about their staging by those who have written on the period have been falsely colored by the general assumption of sweeping innovations based upon Clement Scott's assertions. For instance, such a wrong impression is conveyed by Filon in mentioning the few familiar claims of the Bancroft management for originality in realism, such as the blast of snow coming through the half-opened door in *Ours*, the ceiling and the door knobs in *Caste*, and the

[1] Baker, p. 295.

[2] March 21, 1864.

real flowers and birds elsewhere introduced. He asserts by way of contrast: "Charles Mathews was thought very enterprising because he had ventured to have some chairs placed in a drawing-room upon the stage." Again the inference is wrong when he declares: "As for the actresses, instead of being made guys of by the costumers, they had real dresses made for them by real dress-makers."

There can be little doubt that vast improvements in all these particulars had been made long before the beginning of the Bancroft management. Undoubtedly these workers added much in details, but the wild extravagances of the early century had disappeared from the London stages before the decade of the Bancrofts. I have yet to see any clear statement as to the exact nature of their innovations except those I have already mentioned. There is very little even in those that we can be certain had not appeared earlier. We know that constructed ceiling effects had been tried, perhaps as early as Planché's *Minister and Mercer* in 1834,[1] and certainly in Fechter's productions in 1863. Careful costuming was as old as Madame Vestris's management of the Olympic; and as for chairs "ventured . . . in a drawing-room," we have already learned how incorrectly such a statement represents the Vestris innovations at Covent Garden and the Lyceum.

Thus we find that, instead of the sudden revolution usually believed to have taken place at the Prince of Wales's Theatre in all such matters, there was, in fact, a slow and sure movement in all the theatres of London since the beginning of the century toward the realism which the Bancroft management brought gradually to a "modern" degree of completeness. Previous important progress was made, as we have, I think, clearly proved, by Planché, Stanfield, Charles Kemble, Macready, Charles Kean, Vestris, Beverley, Mathews, Boucicault, and Fechter.

[1] See p. 273.

The distinction of the Prince of Wales's management was not that it created new methods of scenic representation, but that it for the first time revealed the arts of the stage in their most suggestive relation to the work of the dramatist. The Bancrofts made no appeal to the public merely by means of scenery and costume. With them as with Robertson it was ever the play first and the setting afterwards. They were the first to apply with artistic control the principle of scenic fitness. With them the work of the dramatist was no longer a vehicle for brilliant spectacle and sensational realism. Instead, they made the art of the scene painter and machinist merely illustrative, without ostentation or sensation, of the greater art of their master Robertson.

Mrs. Siddons as Sigismunda
Copy of a drawing by Sir Thomas Lawrence

Chapter XIII

THE STREAM OF LIFE ON THE STAGE
ACTING OF THE POETIC DRAMA

LES genres dramatiques ont besoin de grands acteurs en tout temps, mais surtout dans leur jeunesse et dans leur décrépitude." For a demonstration of the half truth thus expressed by Petit de Juleville,[1] it would be difficult to find a fitter instance than that of the English stage of the early nineteenth century. Both conditions, youth and decrepitude, were united: the ancient drama of poetical romance was well-nigh in its dotage, while the drama of realism was still in its infancy. The only genuinely vital appeal made by the theatre, except at the very end of the period, was made through the actors. Without a correct conception of the lines of development in their art, it is, I believe, almost impossible to explain the strange stagnation that characterized the literature of the drama. Whatever creative energy was displayed in the English theatres during the first half of the century appeared, not in written drama, but in the spoken; not in conception, but in expression. We have already reviewed this advance in the many aids to the art of expression, such as stage management, scenery, and costumes: it now remains for us to follow the development of the actor's technique, for in that perhaps as much as in any literary influences of the day was to be found the current of a vital drama. We shall first follow the progress made in the interpretation of the poetic drama, especially tragedy, and in the following chapter we shall trace the stages through which the realistic art advanced chiefly in comedy, melodrama, and burlesque.

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[1] *Le Théâtre en France.*

If the dramatist's position was a difficult one, that of the actor was hardly less so. In the days of the monopoly he had to choose between *majordom* and *minordom:* if he preferred the former, he committed himself to an inexorable tyranny, not only of managers but of popular taste, which clamored for spectacles, animals, and acrobats: if he chose the latter, unless he was one of the few at the Olympic or Haymarket, he had to abandon all ideals of art, and cater merely to the tastes of a coarse public. His refuge — which in many cases had also been his origin — was the provinces. His life was divided between the wretched and uncertain exile on the circuit, with its weary miles of comfortless travel, and the bitter struggle with the exclusive circle of the London stars. Said Macready before the Committee of Parliament in 1832:

> The profession of the actor appears at present to be the very worst that an intellectual man can select. Its requisites are more various, its difficulties greater, its remuneration, except to the exorbitantly paid few, worse and more uncertain, and its duties more harassing than those of any other. He shifts from theatre to theatre, and is associated at the will of his master, with horse and wild beast.

He found it "so unrequiting that no person who had the power of doing anything better would, unless deluded into it, take it up."

The actor's training, as a rule, was acquired on the circuit, and his schooling was the imitation of some great London actor — Kemble, Cooke, Kean, or Macready. There were, to be sure, occasional attempts to establish schools of acting. Such was the Garrick juvenile theatre mentioned by Leigh Hunt with contempt,[1] and such also was the Musical and Dramatic Academy founded by Mr.

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[1] *Critical Essays*, pp. 145 ff.

and Mrs. Glover in 1848.[1] The former left few traces, although some of its pupils, like Miss Pope, were notably successful. The Dramatic Academy was more influential. Besides placing on the professional stage a few such stars as Amy Sedgwick, it was the centre of much amateur activity, which added energy to the theatrical life of the times. Actual experience, however, was the principal means of preparing actors for the London theatres. Bancroft, for instance, tells us that in four and a half years in the provinces he had assumed 446 rôles, playing as many as forty in a single engagement of thirty-six days in Dublin.[2]

For the present, we shall confine our attention to the acting of the old poetic drama. The century began with a style known as the "classical school" of Kemble and Siddons. The preceding mood of "literal realism," attributed to Garrick, had left scarcely a trace. The theory upon which the Kemble school was developed is nowhere better stated than in Leigh Hunt's defence of the principles involved.

> The tragic [he said], is always a step above nature; for the imitation of tragedy, paradoxical as the phrase may seem, must be somewhat imperfect in its resemblance to real life in order to be pleasing; . . . in proportion as they [the audience] lost a sense of this imitation, they would be awake to a sorrow too apparently real to be softened into a pleasing effect.[3]

With this theory reminiscent of pseudo-classicism as the basis of the "Kemble religion," went also two other characteristics of classicism — imitation of the ancients and pedantry. It was Kemble's constant aim in looks and manners to be the noble Roman, and in this aim he succeeded better, perhaps, than any other person known to the English stage. Hazlitt describes him as "the only one of the moderns who both in figure and action approaches the beauty and grandeur of the antique."[1] Macready sets him vividly before us in the warmth of his own first impressions. "As he sat majestically in his curule chair, imagination could not supply a grander or more noble presence. In face and form he realized the most perfect ideal that ever enriched the sculptor's or the painter's fancy, and his deportment was in accord with all the outward dignity and grace that history attributes to the *patres conscripti.*"

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[1] *Theat. Jour.*, Feb. 24, 1848. The school was at No. 21a, Soho Square.

[2] Filon, p. 105.

[3] *Critical Essays*, 1807, p. 142.

The manner of his person was also that of his mind, which, as Hazlitt puts it, might be "summed up in the word 'intensity' in seizing upon some one feeling or idea, in insisting upon it, in never letting it go, and in working it up with a certain graceful consistency and conscious grandeur of conception to a very high degree of pathos or sublimity."[2] Macready helps us with a specific instance in Kemble's performance of Addison's *Cato:*

> The tragedy, five acts of declamatory unimpassioned verse, the monotony of which, correct as his emphasis and reading was, Kemble's husky voice and labored articulation did not tend to dissipate or enliven, was a tax upon the patience of the hearers. The frequently recurring sentiments on patriotism and liberty awakening no response were listened to with respectful, almost drowsy attention. But, like an eruptive volcano from some level expanse, there was one burst that electrified the house. When Portius entered with an exclamation,
>
> "Misfortune on misfortune! grief on grief!
> My brother Marcus" —
>
> Kemble, with a start of unwonted animation, rushed across the stage to him, huddling questions one upon the other with extraordinary volubility of utterance:
>
> "Ah, what has he done? —
> Has he forsook his post, has he given way,
> Did he look tamely on and let them pass?"

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[1] *View of the English Stage*, 1818.

[2] Hazlitt on the occasion of Kemble's retirement, June 25, 1817, *A View of the English Stage.*

Then listening with intense eagerness to the relation of Portius, — how

> "Long at the head of his few faithful friends
> He stood the shock of a whole host of foes,
> Till, obstinately brave and bent on death,
> Oppressed with multitudes, he greatly fell," —

as he caught the last word, he gasped out convulsively, as if suddenly relieved from an agony of doubt, "I am satisfied!" and the theatre rang with applause most heartily and deservedly bestowed. This was his great effect — indeed, his single effect.

Macready comments further:

> His attitudes were stately and picturesque but evidently prepared; even the care he took in the disposition of his mantle was distinctly observable. If meant to present a picture of stoicism, the success might be considered unequivocal, but unbroken except for the one grand effect above described; though it might satisfy the classic antiquary, the want of variety and relief rendered it uninteresting and often, indeed, tedious.[1]

This impression of his manner is amply supported by the testimony of Hunt and Hazlitt, one describing his "seriousness" as "unbending," and the other declaring that "in Mr. Kemble's acting there was neither variableness nor shadow of turning. He played *Hamlet* like a man in armor." This fallacious attempt to reproduce a classic personage merely by imitating the cool poise of classic sculpture was accompanied by the far more serious defect of spurious pedantry. We have already noted this inaccuracy in the matter of staging and costumes. Macready, in the account just quoted, remarks that "having heard so much of his scholarly correctness, I expected in his costume to see a model of the *togata;* but the cumbrous drapery in which he was enveloped bore no resemblance in any one fold or peculiarity to the garment that distinguished the Roman as one of the *rerum dominos*." A more objectionable form of false pedantry tainted his diction. Hunt informs us that some of the "instances of this fault are so ludicrous that a person who has not seen him would scarcely credit the relation." Not only was he too "carefully distinct," but he made the most of every opportunity to employ what might appear as an erudite pronunciation, such as, *air* for *er*.[1] Frequently, as Hunt declares, the effect was most amusing, as in such lines as the following, which, as Kemble read them, were quite translated from their first sense:

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[1] *Reminiscences*, chap. ix, p. 101 (Macmillan, 1875).

> In my breast my spirit *stares* [stirs]
> Since all my soul is full of *hairs* [hers].

"I could mispronounce much better than he," said Hunt, "when I was a mere infant."[2]

This, then, was the theory and practice of the great Kemble's performance, a conception of tragic action as distinctly above nature, modelled not after classical life, but after classical statuary, — and incorrectly at that, — but, worst of all, blurred by an affected pedantry that was not only fallacious but offensive to the simple and learned alike. Above all these qualities — good and bad — there rose, however, the greatness of personality, fusing them and giving them at once the magic of appeal and command.

The image of the Kemble grandeur, with its stagy grace and still more stagy declamation, was with slight variation the ideal of all London actors before the Fechter revolution in 1860. To be sure, Kean, Macready, and numerous other performers were to give it more variety, more energy, more vitality: but even so, when its influence was believed to be passing in the days of Phelps and Charles Kean, its essential unreality still pervaded

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[1] An affectation still to be heard in English speech.

[2] *Critical Essays*, 1807. For Kemble's pronunciation of *aches* as a word of two syllables, there was more metrical justification.

"legitimate" stage art. For that reason, I have felt it necessary at the beginning of the present chapter to make clear the prototype of this important stage tradition. Kemble's manner was ingenuously described — very much as, a century earlier, the prevailing style of action had been epitomized by Addison's Sir Roger — by a blind man, who remarked to Charles Lamb, his neighbor in the pit, "I should have thought that that man had been reading something out of a book, if I had not known I was in a playhouse."

The other great exponent of the "classical school" was the more universally admired Siddons. Kemble's ideal was a marble from the chisel of Phidias — hers from that of Praxiteles. We are fortunate to have criticisms of many of the actors written both during and after their career on the stage, thus enabling us to see them, not only through the dazzled eyes of a contemporary, but also through those of one who has exchanged a hasty mood of participation for the calmer one of reminiscence and reflection. Thus Leigh Hunt, who was a devoted worshipper in 1804, writes of the poet Campbell's idolatry of Siddons:

> He has not succeeded in divesting us of a notion (produced, perhaps, by our having known her only upon the stage and during the latter part of her career) that she was a person more admirable than charming, and not even so perfectly admirable on the stage as the prevalence of an artificial style of acting in her time induced her worshippers to suppose. She was doubtless a grand and effective actress, never at a loss and equal to any demand of the loftier parts of passion, but her grandeur always appeared to us rather of the queenlike and conventional order, than of the unaffectedly heroical.

In his earlier writings,[1] he had pronounced her "not studied and always natural." In this respect she was the direct opposite of her brother Kemble. Unlike him, she felt first and acted afterwards. Leigh Hunt averred that

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[1] *Critical Essays*, 1807 (written in 1804 for the *News*).

"to see the bewildered melancholy of Lady Macbeth walking in her sleep, or the widow's mute stare of perfected misery by the corpse of the gamester Beverley, two of the sublimest pieces of acting on the English stage, would argue this point better than a thousand critics."

Although Siddons lacked one quality that he called "amatory pathetic," he had

> in vain considered and reconsidered all the tragedies in which he had seen her to find the shadow of another. She united with her noble conceptions of nature every advantage of art, every knowledge of stage propriety and effect. This knowledge, however, she displayed not with the pompous minuteness of Mr. Kemble, but with that natural carelessness which shows it to be the result of genius rather than grave study.

She, too, had her affectations — strangely like some we ceased to admire in Bernhardt — as attested by Genest, who noted that "Mrs. Siddons in some particular situations had a look with her eyes which was hardly possible to describe — that she seemed in a manner to turn them into her head — the effect was exquisite but almost painful."

"Her common recitation," too, Hazlitt tells us,[1] "was faulty. It was in bursts of indignation or grief, in sudden exclamation, in apostrophes, and in articulate sounds that she raised the soul of passion to its height or sunk it in despair."

These defects, however, unlike those of her brother, were secondary and pardonable. They were not consciously cultivated in her art. The finest creations of her genius concealed all such defects — the greatest of them all we have preserved for us, perhaps as well as any one art can preserve another, in a word portrait by Hazlitt,[2] who wrote of her Lady Macbeth:

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[1] *Examiner*, Aug. 15, 1814.

[2] "On Characters of Shakespeare's Plays," in the *London Journal*, no. 44, vol. ii (1835).

Mrs. Siddons as Queen Katherine
From a drawing by John Hayter

We can conceive of nothing grander. It was something above nature. It seemed almost as if a being of superior order had dropped from a higher sphere to awe the world with the majesty of her appearance. Power was seated on her brow. Passion emanated from her breast as from a shrine; she was tragedy personified. In coming on in the sleeping scene, her eyes were open but their sense was shut. She was like a person bewildered and unconscious of what she did. Her lips moved involuntarily — all her gestures were involuntary and mechanical. She glided on and off the stage like an apparition. To have seen her in that character was an event in any one's life not to be forgotten.

Such, then, was the finest example of the acting of the "classical school," the influence of which was to be felt, in its faults if not in its virtues, through all the freer romantic styles which were to be superimposed upon it. In Charles Kemble, Charles Young, Mrs. Warner, Vandenhoff, and many lesser imitators, it was to continue almost without modification into the days of Macready and the younger Kean. Its following, however, became less and less enthusiastic, and after 1830 no one can be said to have succeeded greatly in the unmodified Kemble school of acting.

Even at its height, there were those in London who dared to compete in a wholly different style. The chief of these was George Frederick Cooke. His differences, however, seem not to have been on the side of nature. Kemble and his imitators had departed from nature to realize the classical ideals of loftiness and precision: Cooke departed from nature in order to appear inhumanly subtle and impassioned. One erred in the way of order: the other abandoned himself lawlessly to an impressive but unreal emotion. Leigh Hunt characterized him as "the Machiavel of the modern stage." [1] His specialty was craft, and therefore Iago, Stukely, Sir Pertinax McSycophant, and

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[1] *Critical Essays*, p. 216.

Richard were his most popular impersonations. He was master, Hunt declares, "of every species of hypocrisy."

The characteristics of his style as well as his relation to the classical school are well set forth by Charles Lamb:

> He has a tongue that can wheedle the devil. It has been the policy of that ancient and gray similator in all ages to hide his horns and claws. The Richard of Mr. Cooke perpetually obtruded his. We see the effect of his deceit uniformly successful, but we do not comprehend how it succeeds. . . . The hypocrisy is too glaring and visible. . . . We are inclined to admit that in the delivery of single sentences and in a new and often felicitous light thrown on old and hitherto misconstrued passages, no actor that we have seen has gone beyond Mr. Cooke. He is always alive to the scene before him and by the fire and novelty of his manner he seems likely to infuse some warm blood into the frozen declamatory style into which our theatres have for some time past been degenerating.[1]

Baker — I think accurately — concludes that "he was an actor of superlative power, who by his terrific intensity took an audience captive and rendered them utterly oblivious at the time of his exaggeration and contempt for nature."[2] In after years he was regarded as the great exemplar of what was termed "physical acting," of which Edwin Forrest and especially G. V. Brooke were later brilliant exponents on the London stage. Although Cooke's peculiar powers made him very popular with the unthinking public, his incessant dissipation rendered him harmless as a competitor with the classical school, and his individuality made a school of imitators unlikely. Until 1814 the Kemble manner continued without serious rivalry.

Charles Kemble, the youngest brother of the great John, carried much of the classic spirit into comedy. Pückler-Muskau states that even his Falstaff "combined courtly grace with vulgarity by way of entertainment."

[1] *Morning Post*, Jan. 2, 1802.

[2] Baker, p. 125.

"Indolent languor," Hunt tells us, was his bane. The last of the Kembles was Charles's daughter Fanny, who enjoyed a phenomenal success in 1829. It is clear that the original classical manner, although somewhat modified, continued as the chief inspiration of her acting. Indeed, after her London success she failed in Bath, where the critics declared that she was "Siddonian, too sepulchral, and old." [1] The effect of this manner in a day when it had become obsolete is interestingly pictured by Leigh Hunt in his *Tatler*, for October 5, 1830. He expresses disappointment and dissents frankly from the prevailing opinion regarding her success.

> Her manner and tone [he admits] were natural, her smile equally so. We thought she was going to trust entirely to her own feelings; and as we looked at the general expression of her face, could not help quoting to ourselves the words of the old poet,
>
> Simple goodness shined in her eyes!
>
> But the moment she gave us the first burst of feeling our expectations fell many degrees and they never rose again. . . . The regular theatrical start and vehemence were substituted for the natural emotions of the artless girl.

Hers was the "conventional tragic style both in voice and manner"; she seemed to Hunt "entirely an artificial performer." He notes, too, that the enthusiasm was not as great and spontaneous as upon her début.

In 1814, indeed, there had already come about a powerful reaction from the Kemble school. In that year there appeared two of the supremely great geniuses of the English stage, Kean and O'Neill.

Edmund Kean made his London début as Shylock at Drury Lane, January 26, 1814. He was almost unknown and therefore only a small audience had gathered to greet him. Fortunately Hazlitt was among them. This critic later looked back upon Kean's appearance as "the first gleam of genius breaking athwart the gloom of the stage." At the time of the début he declared: "It is not saying too much of him, though it is saying a good deal, that he has all that Mr. Kemble lacks of perfection." Hazlitt admitted, however, that in Kean he missed the statuesque qualities of Kemble, but this admission he tactfully turned against Kean's critics: "His detractors," he sarcastically remarked, "argued from what he was not. He was not tall, he had not a fine voice, he did not play at Covent Garden, he was not John Kemble." They had overlooked the significant truth "that almost every scene had the stamp and freshness of nature." Again he declared, "In truth of nature and force of passion, in discrimination and originality, we see no inferiority to any one on the part of Mr. Kean."

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, no. 2647, June 8, 1830.

Genest states that "Kean's voice was very bad — his figure was not only diminutive but insignificant — his natural appearance, when not counteracted by dress, was mean." The contrast between the man Kean and the actor is well drawn in an anecdote from Douglas Jerrold.[1] When Kean was in Sheerness, Jerrold's boyhood home, an intruder in a box greatly irritated him by calling him "Alexander the Little." Commanding the fire and impressiveness that later made him famous, he folded his arms and moved toward the offender. "Alexander the Little," again jeered the wit. "Yes," retorted Kean with all the magnificent vehemence of his nature, "but with a Great Soul!"

Although Kean was universally admired as the originator of a natural school of acting, it must not be supposed that his art was natural in the sense that we attach to the word "realism" to-day. He was natural merely as contrasted with the stiffness of Kemble and the exaggerated abandon of Cooke. "To see Kean," said Coleridge, "was

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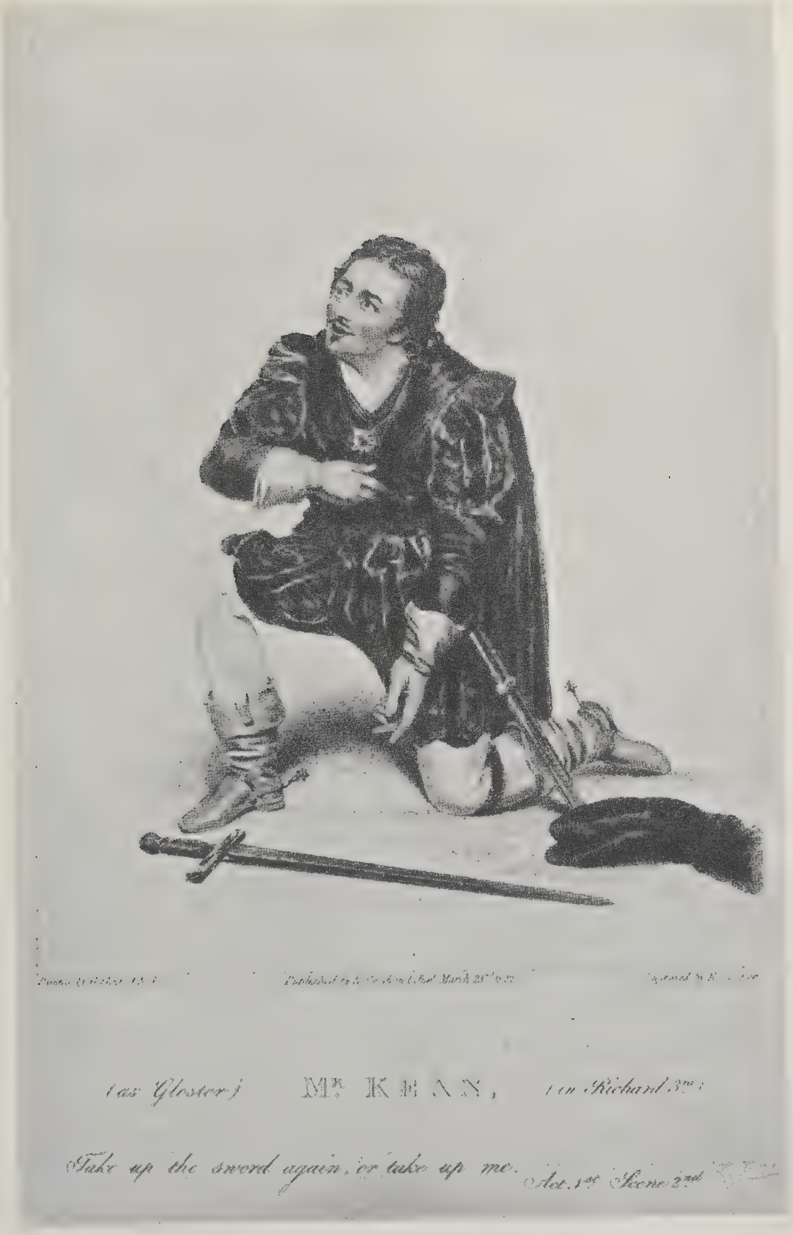
[1] Blanchard Jerrold gives it in *The Life of Douglas Jerrold*, chap. i, p. 21.


(as Gloster) Mr. KEAN, (in Richard 3rd)
Take up the sword again, or take up me. Act 1st Scene 2nd

EDMUND KEAN AS GLOSTER

From a colored engraving by Cooper of a portrait by Clint

to read Shakespeare by flashes of lightning." His realism consisted in a brilliant expression of instinctive emotion which was in itself so genuine that its very sincerity made the wild actions and the wilder ranting to which it gave rise seem real and natural too. "Concentrated depth of feeling and energy of passion," said the *Observer*,[1] was the essential quality of his style, "which was the foundation of a school of acting that has done more toward removing the artificial and declamatory style that had so long prevailed, and instituting in its stead one of nature and feeling." "In a word," said Hazlitt, "Mr. Kean's acting is like an anarchy of the passions, in which each upstart humor, or frenzy of the moment is struggling to get violent possession of some bit or corner of his fiery soul and pigmy body — to jostle out and lord it over the rest of the rabble of short-lived and furious purposes."[2]

Such are some of the most vivid impressions we have of Edmund Kean's manner. It was evidently the outpouring of a lawless passionate nature, directed, but not wholly controlled, by a strong and fearless intellect. It proceeded from a character which off the stage led to a life of ruinous extravagance, dissipation, and even crime.[3] The terrific violence of his passionate outbursts is familiar stage tradition. In the exterminating fury of Sir Giles in the last act of Massinger's play, the effect he produced, not only upon the audience, but upon the actors who shared the scene with him, was said to be appalling. His wrath has been likened to "a hurricane, a tornado, a sweeping blast."

His realism showed itself not only in the genuineness of his emotion and in its transforming power, but also in a faithful reproduction of nicer, almost morbid, realities, such as actors in general, and especially those of his day, utterly disregarded. A fellow actor writing for Leigh

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[1] No. 1589, Jan. 9, 1827.

[2] *London Magazine*, no. 11, Feb., 1820.

[3] In 1825 he was convicted of illicit relations with Mrs. Cox.

Hunt's *Tatler*,[1] tells, for instance, of the startling reality of his death scenes. Those of *Richard*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet* were nicely differentiated. In the latter, particularly, he portrayed to perfection the physical results of quick-acting poison on the blood.

We are, however, principally interested in the Kean methods as they mark progress over the Kemble and Siddons school, for by his contemporaries he was regarded as a great revolutionary force, and by posterity he was followed as the originator of a new school of acting.

What the contrast between Kemble and Kean really was is made evident by Hazlitt's comparison, of these two leaders:

> We wish we had never seen Mr. Kean. He has destroyed the Kemble religion, and it is the religion in which we were brought up. Never again shall we behold Mr. Kemble with the same pleasure that we did, nor see Mr. Kean with the same pleasure that we have seen Mr. Kemble formerly. We used to admire Mr. Kemble's figure and manner and had no idea that there was any want of art or nature. We feel the force of nature in Mr. Kean's acting, but then we feel the want of Mr. Kemble's person.[2]

It has frequently been maintained that romanticism, which took possession of every other realm of English literature during the early nineteenth century, was strangely unproductive in the drama. Nothing could be further from the truth, if we mean by drama, action taking place upon the stage. Romanticism was the very essence of Kean's art. So it was regarded not only by himself, but by all who wrote about him or imitated him. It was not, as in the case of literature, a weak, timid beginning, but it was a sudden, powerful, and altogether triumphant revolution effected within the brief period of an evening's entertainment. Kean was not, perhaps, like Macready, who followed and imitated him, a romantic theorist, a transcendentalist, a mystic, or the like. To Kean romanticism meant simply the outpouring of passion. If this were not the complete creed of romanticism, it was at least so important a part of it as to give his own school and all later developments from it the title of romantic. Indeed, Hazlitt, the chief of the romantic critics, was Kean's greatest advocate and supporter. Hazlitt was the first to recognize in him an attempted return to nature and to pronounce it good. Even when he bemoaned the passing of the "Kemble religion," he had no desire to revive it at the cost of the naturalism and spontaneity of Kean's romanticism.

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[1] Sept. 23, 1831.

[2] *View of the English Stage*, entered under Dec. 7, 1816.

He was, however, aware of the crudity of many of Kean's mannerisms when compared with the more polished ones of the classic school. In comparing Kean with Siddons he says:

> She did the greatest things with childlike ease. Her powers seemed never tasked to the utmost, and always as if she had inexhaustible resources still in reserve. The last word she uttered seemed to float to the end of the theatre, the least motion of her hand seemed to command awe and obedience. Mr. Kean is all effort, all violence, all extreme passion; he is possessed with a fury, a demon that leaves him no repose, no time for thought, or room for imagination. He perhaps screws himself up to as intense a degree of feeling as Mrs. Siddons, strikes home with as sure and hard a blow as she did, but he does this by straining every nerve and winding up every faculty to this single point alone; and as he does it by an effort himself, the spectator follows him with an effort also. Our sympathy in a manner ceases with the actual impression and does not leave the same grand and permanent image of itself behind. The Othello furnishes almost the only exception to these remarks. The solemn beautiful manner in which he pronounces the farewell soliloquy is worth all the gladiatorship and pantomime in the world.

Kean's new religion, however, had converted Hazlitt, and, indeed, before many days it captivated all London. Perhaps, as Leigh Hunt suggested, it was a time when

> One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.

Certain it is that Kemble "faded before him as a tragedy ghost."

Similarly romantic tendencies were apparent at the début of Miss O'Neill, October 6, 1814. She differed less from Siddons, however, than Kean had differed from Kemble. Although O'Neill seems to have excelled in classic grace, her special claim to novelty was in the domestic simplicity of her portrayal of emotion.

> She owed comparatively little [said Hazlitt] to physical qualities. . . . Her excellence (unrivalled by any actress since Mrs. Siddons) consisted in truth of nature and force of passion. Her correctness did not seem the effect of art or study, but an instinctive sympathy of a conformity of mind and disposition to the character she was playing, as if wholly classical. Her style of acting was smooth, round, polished, and classical, like a marble statue; . . . her manner was, in this respect, the opposite of Mr. Kean's.[1]

Her classicism, however, was not at all of the Siddons order, for precisely what Siddons lacked, O'Neill possessed in the highest degree—intimacy, tenderness, and pathos. It was for her that Shelley intended his Beatrice. Her romantic qualities are suggested in the following passage of praise written by Pückler-Muskau:[2]

> How fearful, how heart-rending, how true, and yet how ever beautiful, did she know how to rise even to the very last moment! Certain of her aim, she sometimes ventured to the very utmost verge of her art and did what no other could have attempted without falling into the ridiculous: but in her it was just these efforts which operated as electric shocks.

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[1] Hazlitt, *London Magazine*, Feb., 1820. See Dent edition, viii, 391.

[2] *Tour of a German Prince*, ii, letter 8.

Again her romantic tendencies are revealed in the following characterization by Hazlitt: "Her tenderness of sensibility and the simple force of passion could not be surpassed."

Reynolds,[1] too, intimates her romantic characteristics when he says, "She was of too boisterous and vehement a nature — in this judgment I am in the minority — for, by the verdict of the million, Miss O'Neill was pronounced a younger and a better Mrs. Siddons."

In stage romanticism, however, O'Neill seems to have differed from Kean very much as in the romanticism of poetry Wordsworth differed from Byron.

Thus early the spirit of romance held sway over the destinies of the English stage. In vain did Charles and Fanny Kemble, the Vandenhoffs, Young, and others attempt to perpetuate the classical style. When once the people, as a critic well said, had a taste of the vitality of the romantic art on their stage, they no longer would support, however they might admire, the older classic methods, which afterwards they found "stiff, declamatory, and artificial."

Here, again, we must remember that we are dealing in comparisons and not in fixed standards and absolute classifications. With our realistic background, we should find even the manner of Kean, Macready, and Phelps "stiff, declamatory, and artificial," and their tragic norm elevated beyond any suggestion of nature. The bursts of terribly impressive emotion, which electrified Kean's auditory, would probably amuse us as an example of "that elevation above nature," which in our mind associates itself with classical ideals. The very size of the monopoly theatres made such elevation unavoidable. For this reason I am inclined to believe that the "Kemble religion" had not been overthrown completely before Fechter's memorable performance of *Hamlet*. Whatever of romance or of naturalism had previously crept into tragic action — and there was much of both — was, in reality, superimposed upon the Kemble "elevation of style" and rarely or never completely subversive of it.

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[1] Quoted by Genest, ix, 7.

Fire, flash, mysticism, and even vulgarity became confused with it, but to the very end of our period tragic action and diction continued on a plane which, while it ever tended to lower itself, was ever unmistakably and disagreeably above nature.

In Macready the stage welcomed a much more zealous exponent of romantic tendencies than was Kean. Throughout his long career he was a careful student and observer, following intellectual and artistic developments, not only in England but also in France; besides, during the years of his theatrical ascendency, from Kean's death in 1833 to his own retirement in 1851, he was the constant friend and associate of many of the leading literary men of the day. He was therefore in immediate touch, as his diaries amply show, not only with world thought and literary movements, but with many of the actual leaders in thought and action. It was Macready, by the admission of the French themselves, who brought to their stage the spirit of romanticism. In the midst of a tyranny of classical ideals far more inexorable than England had ever known, Macready inspired Hugo and Dumas, who brought about the revolution in dramatic art inaugurated in the preface to *Cromwell* and the ever memorable first night of *Hernani*.

Filon, for instance, stated that "he was received as a missionary during his visit to the French capital in 1827," and that, "it is certain that these performances revealed to him who was to be the only true dramatist of the romantic school — to Alexander Dumas — the secret of a new art; that they made an epoch, therefore, in our literary history and that they affixed the seal to the reputation of the English tragedian." [1]

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[1] Filon, *The English Stage*, p. 42.

When viewed in its relation to the London stage, his work is far more difficult to characterize. A pioneer in romanticism he certainly was not. He followed Kean not only in chronology [1] but also in the general trend of his stage technique. He was a careful student and admirer of Kean's art, and made no attempt to found a school of acting wholly his own. On the other hand he was no slavish imitator of Kean's peculiarities. He had no need for the excessive physical effort that was a prominent element in all of Kean's acting, for Macready was naturally endowed with a fine figure and a strong and musical voice. Furthermore he lacked much of the spontaneity, or, as a contemporary stated it, the *vivida vis* of Kean. Instead of the domineering personality of his rival, he possessed a much more open, social, and pliant nature, which, while sensitive and self-conscious to an almost morbid extent, was, nevertheless, responsive to almost every kind of influence that played about him.

To the dignity he had learned from Kemble and the realism of a mighty passion which he had taken from Kean, he added at least two other important qualities of style: one, the graceful flexibility of the French actor, Talma; and the other, an intellectual attitude which was variously described as "metaphysical," "mystical," or "transcendental." This latter peculiarity was said by his critics to be the result of the popular German philosophical conceptions that had become so much a part of the British romanticism.

There can be little doubt of Macready's frank emulation of Talma's methods. Although Macready did not see him on the stage until 1822, he observed him with the greatest care, and has recorded the warmest expressions of admiration. Only Talma, of all the French actors, whom, in general, he characterizes as given to "declamatory style," appealed to Macready. Talma himself had developed from a somewhat stilted method of delivery peculiar to the French classical art to a spontaneous, natural, almost colloquial style, and had effected this change during the height of the classical tyranny. Napoleon was generally credited with this conversion. The Emperor was ever a friend and admirer of the actor, but thought his acting too artificial.

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[1] Kean had appeared in 1814; Macready's début was on Sept. 16, 1816.

> You see in this palace [said Napoleon] kings who have come to solicit the restitution of their estates; great captains who have come to ask me for crowns. Ambitions and other violent passions agitate all who surround me; here I behold men offering to serve those whom they hate, young princesses entreating me to restore them to their lovers, from whom I have separated them. Are not these tragic characters? And I am perhaps the most tragic of all. Yet you do not find that we continually strain our voices and make violent gestures. We are calm, except at those times when agitated by passion, and those moments are always of short duration.

How Talma's art, thus modified, appeared to Macready in 1822, he has described in glowing terms:

> The genius of Talma . . . rose above all the conventionality of schools. Every turn and movement, as he trod the stage, might have given a model for the sculptor's art, and yet all was effected with such apparent absence of preparation as to make him seem utterly unconscious of the dignified and graceful attitudes which he represented. His voice was flexible and powerful, and his delivery articulate to the finest point without a trace of pedantry. There was an ease and freedom, whether in familiar colloquy, in lofty declamation, or burst of passion, that gave an air of unpremeditation to every sentence, one of the highest achievements of the histrionic art. . . . To my judgment he was the most finished artist of the times, not below Kean in his most energetic displays, and far above him in the refinement of his taste and extent of his research, equalling Kemble in his dignity, unfettered by his stiffness and formality.[1]

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[1] Macready's *Reminiscences*, chap. xv (Macmillan, 1875, p. 180).

Undoubtedly the easy naturalism that characterized much of Macready's acting was the result of his admiration for the Talma style. It would be incautious to carry any such consideration beyond a suggestion. Of all the arts, the actor's is the most pliant and intangible — furthermore, it is entirely subordinate to personality. Any effect which is observed and imitated may be wholly changed when reproduced. Talma's manner when imitated by Macready could no longer be Talma's. It is enough, perhaps, to note that Macready studied not only Kemble and Kean, but also the great French genius whom he regarded as superior to both.

The other quality which went into the formation of Macready's style is more difficult at this distance to understand. It was, nevertheless, an important feature of his art, and one which was, apparently, seized upon most successfully by his imitators. "We have been dosed," says an old playgoer in the *Theatrical Journal* for September 27, 1849, "with metaphysical Macreadyism." This same quality was probably meant by Marston,[1] when he described Macready's Hamlet as "passionate and powerful," of "free impulse and sense of the supernatural." A more specific description of this strange mannerism is given in the statement that "in soliloquies he has a knack of turning up the whites of his eyes which we have never observed in any other actor."[2] Perhaps Filon has explained the mystery in the following assertive paragraph: "Sur un point Macready conservait l'avantage; c'est lorsqu'il regardait dans le vide, lorsque sa face hagarde et figée suggérait la vision de l'invisible. Il n'y avait qu'un Macready pour rendre le surnaturel possible." [3]

Whatever the metaphysical mannerism was, it fitted in perfectly with the romantic art of which Macready was for many years the brilliant exponent. It was merely the actor's attempt to do by histrionic means what the poets of romanticism had more easily accomplished in their subtle verse, namely, to plead that

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[1] *Our Recent Actors*, i, 30.

[2] *Theat. Jour.*, Oct. 18, 1845.

[3] *Théâtre Anglais*, p. 42.

Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither.

It is clear, then, as Archer stated, in his article on the Victorian drama,[1] that Macready's style was eclectic, but not, as Archer said, a combination merely of "Kemble's long-drawn thunder with Kean's flashes of lightning." He brought to bear upon the shaping of his style — a process, which, to his credit, continued until his retirement — every influence, literary or merely histrionic, peculiar to the complex age in which he lived. As a result, his style was composite, varied, and not clearly of any one school.

Mannerism, however, he developed in abundance, as, for instance the gazing into the infinite which gave his style the term "metaphysical." In diction he developed a more objectionable trait of a sort of gasping which apparently became more marked as time went on. "He does not speak freely from the chest," wrote one careful observer,

> but from the throat or teeth. He often catches his breath; he disregards punctuation, he despises the printer's stops (, : ; .). He regards them as the mere toll bars of eloquence and therefore he often dispenses with them; he has a cat-like habit of pouncing upon an author's ideas; he is like a tiger in full pursuit of his prey. He treads softly through a speech, clause by clause . . . stopping at will behind this word and again behind that. His muttered growl thrills to the very heart's core; you see his preparations, his final crouching; and then the final spring; if these movements were performed by a *bona fide* quadruped of Bengal, the audience would not testify their delight by louder acclamations than those which greet Mr. Maccready on these occasions.[2]

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[1] Ward's *Reign of Victoria.*

[2] Quoted from a contemporary review as an accurate portrayal of Macready's methods by the *Theatrical Journal*, May 12, 1869.

B. W. Watkins, writing in 1864,[1] speaks even more trenchantly of the Macready faults. "His acting," says the writer, "was of hectic description"; and again, "his school was a bad one. He was miserably deficient in pathos and feeling."

There can be little doubt, if we may judge from the frequency with which such characterizations appear in the critics of Macready, that these passages are a fair portrayal of the famous actor. They represent the later developments, however, in a style which at first was more spontaneous. As Hazlitt several times described him before 1820, he was "a truly spirited and impassioned declaimer, with a noble voice and a great fervor of manner." No reference is made by his early critics to what were later described as his serious blemishes.

A careful description of his person appeared in the *Theatrical Journal* for October 18, 1845. He was said to be five feet nine inches in height, rather thin and pale; his face, too, was thin and of dark complexion. It was marked by high cheek-bones and a large, rather flat forehead. His hair was dark and his eyes were brown. His gait upright. On the stage he was said to give himself up to the part, never taking the least notice of the audience. In walking on the stage he had an eccentric manner of "lifting up his heels, which by some is considered very graceful."

His crowning distinction lay in his voice and his intimate, familiar passion. "His voice," said Lewes,[2] "is a fine one, powerful, extensive in compass, and containing tones that thrill and tones that weep . . . in all the touching domesticities of tragedy he is unrivalled."

He was constantly on the alert for new and effective stage business. Many of his innovations, however, seem curiously theatrical. In *Macbeth* he instituted the practice of pursuing the dagger about the stage. In *Hamlet*, to show that he was unconcerned in the play scene, he walked up and down at the front of the stage waving a handkerchief.[1]

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[1] *Theat. Jour.*, March 2, 1864.

[2] *Leader*, Feb. 8, 1851.

What these effects were at their best is made vivid for us in the description by Forster of the fight in *Macbeth:*

> Every point of his meeting with Macduff tells with the deepest truth of character; the easy triumph with which he throws off his sword and talks of his charmed life; the agonized and hopeless despair with which he afterwards avoids him; the fiend-like desperation with which he afterwards rushes back upon his weapon: — the fight is a rich succession of gladiatorial pictures expressive of the sublime will and imagination of Macbeth, — strengthened and made more sublime by the approach of death. Nothing can be grander than his manner of returning with that regal stride after he has received his mortal thrust, to fall again on Macduff's sword in yielding weakness. The spirit fights, but the body sinks in mortal faintness. Still as it sinks, Macbeth survives! and Mr. Macready's attitude in falling, when he thrusts his sword into the ground and by its help for one moment raises himself to stare into the face of his opponent with a gaze that seemed to concentrate all majesty, hate, knowledge, had an air of the preternatural fit to close such a career!

Perhaps the most considerable of all the Macready innovations, making for progress, was his marked approach to naturalism. Filon goes so far as to declare that Macready was "the first to see the coming of realism." This is, perhaps, too strong an assertion. For surely Kean had also pursued the will-o'-the-wisp of realism, not to mention many who had sought it in comedy. It remained for Macready, however, to introduce in the midst of tragic elevation the contrast of perfectly matter-of-fact colloquialism. This was perhaps a suggestion taken from Talma. Whatever its source, it was one of the most constantly noticeable of the Macready mannerisms, and it made him appear strikingly real to an audience accustomed to the deal of fustian and bombast that was an inheritance from the classic art of Kemble and the romantic fury of Kean.

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[1] *Examiner*, Oct. 11, 1835. (Forster.) It was this piece of business that called forth from Edwin Forrest the hiss which started the tragic controversy between the American actor and Macready.

In the scene after the murder in *Macbeth*, for instance, Forster declares, "Mr. Macready's broken and terrifying whispers fell with a cold and death-like abruptness on the hearts of all — in the nearest and remotest corners of the theatre." So much were such effects a part of Macready's style that Forster is led to remark: "The objection urged by the critics against the frequent lowering of Mr. Macready's voice should be levelled at the vulgar necessities of the stage. The fault of this fine actor is that he is unable at all times to sacrifice his audience to the author." [1]

Leigh Hunt in the *Tatler* [2] declared: "He is best where he approaches domestic passion and has to give way to soft or overwhelming emotions." Marston, looking back upon him from the view-point of a following generation remarked: [3] "No feature of this actor was more especially his own than the sudden yet natural infusion into his more heroic vein of some homely touch of truth which gave reality to the scene." He illustrates by two passages from *Virginius*. The platitudes of Knowles corresponded in an unmistakable fashion to this Macready mannerism. Especially simple and true was his reading of the pleasantry with Virginia over the picture:

> I have seen this face; tut, tut, I know it
> As well as I do my own; but can't bethink me
> Whose face it is.

Still more effective was his change from rage to tenderness when he said,

> I never saw you look so like your mother
> In all my life.

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[1] *Examiner*, Oct. 4, 1835.

[2] Nov. 29, 1830.

[3] *Our Recent Actors*, i, 35.

Leigh Hunt in the *Tatler*[1] tells us, too, of a similar effect in *Hamlet.* He complains of Macready's "unwarrantable loudness . . . where he makes the stab through the arras, crying out 'dead for a ducat'"; but Hunt states that "it was followed by a very fine and effective contrast in tone in the rapid question — 'Is it the King?'"

Such changes of style were not always in favor with Macready's critics. One writer in 1830[2] complained that he "made his transitions from familiar dialogue to vehement declamation with too great abruptness"; and another signing himself "Beta," reminiscing in the days of Fechter, Boucicault, and Robertson,[3] recalled that "even Macready used to introduce as a contrast the familiar and the abrupt in the midst of his finest passages and narrowly escaped the imputation of illustrating the aphorism of Voltaire, 'there is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous.'"

It is probable that this mannerism was in part the result of Macready's long apprenticeship at Covent Garden in melodramatic rôles. So eminently had nature fitted him for the parts of villains and bravoes, that only a desperate effort on his own part rescued him from a melodramatic career. He could never wholly rise above this style. His contemporaries preferred him in Werner, in Virginius, and in Iago, and in such parts alone admitted his superiority to Kean.

At moments in Macready's acting a very direct realism, in spite of wholly unreal contrasts, gave his audiences a taste of a new theatrical method — new, at least, in the field of poetic tragedy. It was only a beginning, but the beginning was auspicious. His abhorrence of the vulgarity of melodrama never allowed him to carry this realism beyond the "flash" — a mere suggestion. As a writer[1] in 1826 put it, his good judgment had chosen "a fine middle style of acting, which he had marked out for himself and steadily cultivated: he avoids alike the spouting manner of the old school, which the refinement of modern taste could never endure; and the vulgar familiarity with common life which may astonish for a moment, but is sure to disgust on reflection, and to tire on repetition."

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[1] Oct. 22, 1830.

[2] *Theat. Obs.*, no. 2763, Oct. 22, 1830.

[3] *Theat. Jour.*, Feb. 24, 1869.

Westland Marston many years later characterized his manner more gracefully. "There was something, in a word, Homeric in Macready's realism; it gave the force of simple, truthful detail to passion, but was not the substitute for it, nor its principal feature."[2]

Thus we may consider Macready a significant product of his times. Little original in artistic spirit, he was, histrionically, a composite personality, whose chief impulse was romanticism, but whose catholicity laid his mind open to every influence that seemed advantageous to his art. For this reason he was clearly of no distinct school, except that universal one which assumes individual judgment and selection as its fundamental principle. Macready chose to be individual. Since he lacked almost entirely that spontaneous originality which had been Kean's, he abandoned mere instinct and impulse as guides, and relied upon his one great endowment, his intellect. With this he observed minutely, criticized, and composed. To Kean's manner he added Kemble's and Talma's, and blended with them certain philosophical and literary moods of the day: chief among these were a sense of the infinite and a feeling for the beautiful in the nakedly real. Such a blending could hardly fail to be highly artificial, however much it made for progress. It lacked the chief requisite of great art, spontaneity. There was about it too much intellect and too little imagination, too much effect of study and too little of genuine sensibility. What seemed to his audiences to be coming from the heart was really from the head. This strange indirectness, perhaps, called forth from Thackeray the characteristic condemnation: "Intellect he has a plenty, but for all that I think he is a humbug."[1]

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[1] A critic in Bath, quoted as especially just, by *Theat. Obs.*, no. 1403, June 5, 1826.

[2] *Our Recent Actors*, ii, 198.

However effective Macready's style may have been, it was notoriously objectionable in his imitators. Phelps alone seems to have risen above its artificiality and to have seized upon its finer intellectual qualities. The change that had come over the art of tragic acting through the Macready influence was, nevertheless, widely felt. What the change meant to the average playgoer appears from the following quotation in the *Theatrical Journal* for July 25, 1855:

> I cannot but think [says the writer], although recurrence to the old school of art is neither possible nor desirable, the style of acting in this day will not bear comparison with that which our fathers can remember.
>
> The grandeur and sublimity of Siddons, the fire of Kean, the pathos of O'Neill, being inimitable, we see and hear nothing of them; but it is easy to imitate defects of a fine but faulty tragedian and consequently we have unnatural struts, elongated pauses, and abrupt transitions in the Macready fashion, of which we are indeed a-weary.
>
> The dislocation of sentences, the emphasis of nothings, and the tedious elaboration, so common among our actors, are not compensated by the great talent, study, and intellect of Macready, and such things are substituted for genuine nature, passion, and intensity.

As late as in 1860, however, there was still to be heard in London a survival of the "old school," that is, of the methods hailing, at a weakening distance, from Kemble and the older Kean. A writer for the *Theatrical Journal*[2] in 1860 says: "The new school (the followers of Macready) is supported by Phelps, Creswick, Wallack, Jr., C. Pitt, etc. The old had a few representatives in G. V. Brooke, Vandenhoff, Cooper, and Marston." The critic proceeds to compare the two schools as follows:

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[1] This remark of Thackeray's is quoted in the *Theat. Jour.*, Jan. 20, 1864, by a writer claiming to be a cousin of the novelist. The writer challenged the statement.

[2] Nov. 14, 1860.

> The new school attaches far more importance to conception in the acting of a part, and neglects elocution, while the converse is held by others who depend most for plaudits upon good reading and discretion, or upon fiery verse and declamation and the music of potent sound. The mechanism of art is not sufficient, nor is the eternal soul. It is not good for them to be alone.

In all this development it is interesting to note how the art of the stage was feeling its way to a naturalistic technique; but so ingrained had the sense of stage effect become, partly because of the vast theatres, but more, perhaps, because of the dominating figures of Kemble, Kean, and Macready, that the exponents of the realistic methods of Macready preferred to imitate him, without for a moment perceiving that his excellence did not result from his mannerisms, but from the open-mindedness with which he had constructed from all the tendencies of the day a style which should suit his mental and physical endowments, and be in accord with the spirit of the times.

In Phelps, the greatest of all the Macready followers, there was less of the mannerisms, and more of the spirit of the prototype, than in any of the others. There is little evidence, however, that Phelps departed in any marked degree from the general style of his master. He was, perhaps, far more versatile, and went much further than Macready in the direction of the simple realism of domestic feeling. His great advantage over Macready was in a fund of inimitable humor that made his Bottom, Sir Pertinax, Sir Peter Teazle, Falstaff, Malvolio, and Justice Shallow among the finest impersonations of the day.[1]

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[1] Marston, *Our Recent Actors*, ii, 32. Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson speaks appreciatively of his own early training under Phelps, mentioning

Marston declares that he was "excellent in domestic tragedy, and in parts that give scope for the display of warm attachment or pathos; in those, too, which exhibit the morbid bitterness of wounded feeling"; but he thinks that "he failed to strike the heroic note in tragedy."

How he appeared to some who lived on with him into the next generation and saw him in his last Drury Lane revivals is apparent from the following remarks in the *Theatrical Journal* for March 16, 1864.

> The fact is clear that his popularity is dying fast. . . . It has been found that Mr. Phelps never possessed any genius at all in a dramatic way. A contemporary writer has declared this in round terms. In his declamatory passages he becomes almost wholly inarticulate, and his attitudinizing is like nothing that ever existed in nature.

Thus we have followed the classical art of Kemble through the various stages of degeneration, and we have noted that as the classical characteristics disappeared, strong romantic tendencies replaced them. Sometimes those of wild, uncontrolled passion, sometimes the finer ones of natural sensibility to truth. In the main, however, the drift had been away from the artificial and the lofty toward the essential and toward intimate reality.

I have purposely omitted mention of the work of the younger Kean, as his contributions are more naturally related to those styles of acting which militated against the traditional school; and these I mean to trace in the following chapters. As for the formidable Brooke, who for a brief period in the fifties dominated the London stage, the following criticism by Lewes[1] will suffice:

> There was something half comical, half painful in the stupid genuine delight of that eminently British public at the

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especially his great versatility that made him equally successful in tragedy, character parts, and high and low comedy. *A Player under Three Reigns*, p. 67.

[1] *Leader*, Oct. 1, 1853.

Boanerges of the drama as he "split the ears of the groundlings." Physically, then, Gustavus Brooke is the greatest tragic actor on the stage, and, as, except Phelps, all other tragic actors known to me are not what I should call eminently intellectual, what I have just said amounts very much to saying that Brooke is, with that single exception, the greatest tragic actor on our stage.

When he is violent, he is magnificently violent, with a certain leonine, sometimes bovine power — the audiences are in ecstasies.

When he runs up his voice in alt. and drops to a double *g*, with the stretch of the compass, if not with the aplomb of an Alboni, the audiences are naïvely startled by the vocal feat, and, not troubled with critical misgivings as to sense, thoroughly give themselves up to the sensation, and thus a physical actor is applauded by a physical audience.

We must in passing take note of one other and more warrantable sensation created by the American actress Charlotte Cushman, who startled London by the power of her acting in 1845, and who for many seasons exerted a very great influence upon the actresses of tragedy. Among the women of the stage, the majesty and power of Siddons had long since disappeared and a manner characterized by one observer as "the milk-and-water style common among the actresses of England" had taken its place. Cushman came as a sort of revelation of the tragic possibilities of the feminine character in poetic drama. She, like Kean, was a great spontaneous romantic genius whose fire was from within, and her nature like his was awe-inspiring. On all sides her Meg Merrilies was pronounced "one of the most powerful performances the stage ever saw"; and her Lady Macbeth was "the only worthy impersonation of that character since Siddons." It may be interesting to recall Knowles's impressions of her Romeo,[1] which enjoyed almost as much popularity. "Unanimous and lavish as were the encomiums of the

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[1] In a letter published in the *Theat. Jour.*, Nov. 21, 1846.

London press," wrote Mr. Knowles, "I was not prepared for such a triumph of pure genius." Comparing her performance of Romeo with Kean's great third act in *Othello*, he asks:

> Did you ever expect to see anything like it again? I never did. And yet I saw as great a thing last Wednesday evening in Romeo's scene with the Friar after the sentence of banishment — quite as great! I am almost tempted to go farther. It was a scene of topmost passion. I listened and gazed and held my breath while my blood ran hot and cold. . . . My heart and mind are so full of the extraordinary, most extraordinary performance, that I know not where to stop or how to go on!

This was much the impression made upon all who heard her. Some found her too ponderous, too monotonous, too masculine; but all acknowledged her power and her truth. The energy, rather than the manner, of her acting was fresh. The springs of romanticism again ran clear on the English stage.

Cushman and Brooke were, however, but episodic in the progress of the tragic art. The main tendencies of the stage had already been determined. Forces innumerable had been collecting against the Kean and Macready schools; their overthrow was predestined; but as yet, in the public mind and especially in the minds of the more thoughtful, the destruction of the traditional school promised nothing but ruin to the national drama. To many, even Macready's methods were too advanced, too vulgar. A literal realism had in the minds of all connected itself with low comedy and melodrama. It seemed to many that no good would accrue to the poetic drama by an admixture of these contemptible influences. Nevertheless, as the traditional tragic manner gradually lost its vitality and the forces which had given rise to it were disintegrated in the years following the freeing of the theatres, it was precisely these vulgar arts of melodrama and burlesque that were preparing, not only to overthrow the ancient school of acting, but actually to replace it in the hearts of the populace and in the judgment of the sanest critics. The progress of this conflict and the circumstances attending its outcome we must consider in a separate chapter. For the present it suffices to observe that the old traditional school of acting had, as it were of its own accord, developed from a mood of utmost artificiality and declamatory pomp to a subtle, elastic, varied medium of expression in which a tendency toward a simple outpouring of a natural emotion was the leading characteristic. It had gone, perhaps, as far as was possible without a complete change in point of view. Before Charles Kean's management of the Princess's no one had deliberately conceived of tragic action except in the classic elevation above nature. It remained for Fechter fearlessly to throw aside the veil of tradition and to look upon his art through what he thought to be the glass of truth. We have yet to see the mustering of the tendencies in acting which prepared the way for this daring sacrilege.

Chapter XIV

THE STREAM OF LIFE ON THE STAGE
EARLY COMIC ACTING

ALTHOUGH tragedy should be elevated above nature, the reverse should be the case in comedy."[1] The classical dogma thus reiterated by Leigh Hunt was no less applicable to comedy than to tragedy. As the stately unreality of Kemble had raised tragedy immeasurably above nature, so the grinnings of Munden and Fawcett lowered comedy below it. Like Kemble, too, they represented an ideal which — although undergoing modification — remained until 1865 the basic characteristic of comedy acting. Unlike him, however, they had little classic consciousness. The chief influences affecting them were the vastness of the theatres, which demanded exaggerated efforts to produce any effect at all, and more especially the vulgarized audiences that hissed and applauded in accordance with traditional though vague standards, and that loved the coarse laugh. The actor's style was, it appears, what necessity made it.

Although these statements are truer if applied to farce and low comedy than if applied to what was known as "genteel," — meaning the comedies of the Restoration and those of Goldsmith and Sheridan, — it was in a measure true of these higher types as well. Constantly we are told that there was no woman comedian who could appear as a lady of good breeding, and for that matter there seems to have been hardly a man who could convey the impression of a gentleman. Hazlitt, for instance, as late as 1815, declared: "Genteel comedy cannot be acted at present"; and referring to a performance of *A School for Scandal* said, "Little Moses the money-lender was within a hair's breadth of being the only person in the piece who had the appearance and manners of a gentleman." There were, of course, men like Simmons, Bannister, Mathews, and Liston who, as we shall presently see, both in low and high comedy, were contrasted in naturalness with the majority of their fellow artists. But, in the main, the spirit and the externals of comedy were highly fantastical and unreal.

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[1] Leigh Hunt, *Critical Essays*, 1807, p. 143.

Unlike tragedy, comedy acting divided itself with more or less distinctness into groups — the low, the high, and the genteel. As the last-named class made a nearer approach than the others to a modern style, we shall consider it separately in connection with the transition from the old comedy art to the new. For the present, we shall confine our attention to the two other types which were to the average playgoer the mainstays of comedy. Indeed comedy, such as was composed in the early part of the century, could not have succeeded without them. Leigh Hunt, for instance, tells us that, when he found himself greatly amused by the low comedian Bannister in comedies by Reynolds and Dibdin, he began to examine if such as they "were not the true comic writers. It was then," he adds, "that I discovered what excellent actors we possessed. The phrases, the sentiments, the fancies," he explains, "will appear very monotonous and inefficient when separated from the grins of Munden and the chatterings of Fawcett. . . . The monosyllable 'yes' is as admirable a piece of humor in Mr. Munden's mouth as any other touch of rhetoric in modern comedy."

As a result of the popular demand, all comedies tended to be written "about" actors. "If there is a countryman, it must be adapted to Emery; if an Irishman, to Johnston; if a gabbling humorist, it must be copied from nothing but the manner of Fawcett."

This disposition to transcend — to use the word ironically — all the delicacies of comic humor by the buffoonery, the horse-play, and even the travesty of such accomplished clowns, was the prevailing mood of comic stage art. This work, of course, fell chiefly to the low and the light comedian.

The type of the low comedian is too familiar still to require definition. He was, it appears, essentially the same in the early century. The chief difference between his status then and now is that then he enjoyed in every proper comedy a conspicuous rôle in which he could be thoroughly a clown. To-day, although this pleasure has not been wholly denied him, he has been so restrained by his realistic surroundings as to have lost the essential distinction of the early-century low comedian. How he looked to a careful observer of the early period appears in Hazlitt's description of Munden:[1] "With all his merit, his whim, his imagination, and with his broad effects [he] is a caricaturist. . . . He distorts his features to the utmost stretch of grimace, and trawls his voice about with his tongue in the most extraordinary manner, but he does all this with an evident view to the audience."

In this respect he differed from the other great low comedians of the day, for "Liston's style of acting is the unconscious and involuntary. He indulges his own risibility or absurd humors to please himself, and the odd noises he makes come from him as naturally as the bleating of a sheep."

Hardly a comedy, and certainly no farce or melodrama, was written before 1850 which did not make provision for this style of acting. It was easily supplied, it required little originality, and it was an unfailing source of amusement to the public. In the days when Buckstone was its chief embodiment, it had changed in no essential respect — except the degree of exaggeration — since Munden, Fawcett, and Liston had endeared it to the merry London heart. How the low comedian appeared in 1853 we learn from a description in the *Theatrical Journal.*[1] He generally wore a "neat waistcoat, steel Albert watch-guard, which, from the size, looks as if, wanting to make himself a swell, he had deprived the street door of that requisite fastening — the chain." All his coats were of "a peculiar theatrical cut," his "temples shaved" and his "hair behind his ears." In manner he was "exceedingly gentlemanly," and he had "a good-tempered face, head slightly to the left side," and he walked "in an upright manner." He was often indelicate and always insuppressible. He would "ask how much the actress on the stage paid for her bonnet and how she liked his coat," and then walk to the footlights and, "folding his arms in a manner peculiar to himself," ask the audience, "if their mother had disposed of her musical instrument, and purchased a machine for the purpose of erasing creases out of linen."

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[1] *London Magazine*, no. 1, Jan., 1820.

Above all, he was versatile. Robertson describes the low comedian of a shortly later period as a "light-haired, stub-nosed, wide-mouthed variety of the genus *homo*," a "queer cock-eyed sort of baby," the "funny boy of the school," the "druggist's boy," etc.[2]

In Liston the century saw the low comedian *par excellence*. He was universally admitted to be not only a buffoon, but a comic genius of the very highest order. He was admired chiefly because he was natural. From reading the many criticisms that describe him as such, we stand in danger of a misconception of what the writers mean by nature. His nature was not at all that of the ordinary run of men. Nature had already exaggerated him to the highest level of the unusual, before he had uttered a word or made a grinning mask. To say that he was natural, then, as almost all who described him did, simply meant that he produced the same extravagant effects as the other low comedians without any apparent effort. To be himself was to be extravagant. He did not act low comedy — he was its embodiment.

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[1] June 29, 1853.

[2] Robertson in the "Lounger" of the *Illustrated Times* (quoted in *The Life and Writings of T. W. Robertson*).

Thus, when Hazlitt says of his performance in *Love, Law, and Physic*, "a more perfect personation we never witnessed. We insist the more . . . because of all imitations we like imitation of nature best," he means simply, as he says elsewhere: "Mr. Liston has more comic humor, more power of face, and a more genial, happy vein of folly, than any other actor we remember. His face is not caricature; his voice is a pitch-pipe of laughter." [1] Leigh Hunt says of him: "In Mr. Liston's best perfomances he may be called natural in every sense of the word. . . . He adds nothing of stage affectation and diminishes nothing of nature. . . . Yet his manner is so irresistibly humorous that he can put the audience into good humor with less effort, perhaps, than any other comedian." [2] Said a writer in the *Theatrical Journal*, in 1846,[3] the year of his death: "He scarcely ever made his entrance in a play but he was received by involuntary applause, not of hands only . . . but of laughter which the very sight of him provoked. . . . Yet the louder the laughter, the graver his look upon it: and surely the solemnity of his features was enough to have set a whole bunch of Bishops into a titter."

With him low comedy acting, as understood in the early century, reached its utmost perfection. Others distorted their natural selves to be the low comedian; Liston was the one man during the century whom Nature made for the part. He and that masterpiece of absurdity, Paul Pry, were one and the same personage. For once the outrageous was made perfectly plausible, even natural. Never was an actor so much at one with his audience. He laughed for them and with them — and only with them, for, by himself, he was a hypochondriac. So childlike was his love of sympathy that he once declared that "he would like to see a dog wag his tail in approbation." [1]

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[1] The first of these quotations is from the *View of the English Stage*, 1818, and the other from the *London Magazine*, no. 1, Jan., 1820.

[2] *Critical Essays*, 1807.

[3] March 28. He had retired nine years earlier.

What, then, was natural for Liston would have been so for no one else. To imitate him would have been to indulge in the wildest exaggeration. He was, in himself, no part of a movement toward naturalism. For once, Nature had strayed into the most unnatural of schools and had found herself perfectly at home.

The low comedian was, as it were, the flesh and bones of comedy: the light comedian was its life. In the days of the monopoly, the task of supplying comic energy in dull plays acted before dull audiences in huge auditoriums required superhuman effort. The light comedian upon whom this task rested was obliged to resort to every means, mental or physical, to communicate his fun. The result was a strongly marked type of performance, which in later times of stage realism, although remaining in spirit, has lost its type characteristics. Many kinds of light comedy parts are now familiar, whereas in the days of Lewis and Charles Mathews there was but one and that was the direct descendant of the "macaroni," the fop of London society, who in the days of Dr. Johnson had set all London agog with affected mannerisms. There could be no better material for the pseudo-comedy of manners which prevailed in the early nineteenth century, in which extravagance and eccentricity were the dominant features, than was provided in this same hero of all the insincerities. How he could talk and pose and startle and conceal his worthlessness in a glitter of externals! A comedy that could find nothing in its age to imitate, and could entertain its audiences only by extravagance, very naturally turned to this most sensationally unreal of the characters in the preceding generation for its typical hero. Loathsome as such a personage might be in real life, he was certain to be a darling on the stage. So he proved, for he throve for more than fifty years in his histrionic reincarnation. Not until Lord Dundreary and Captain Hawtree dislodged him forever did he cease to exert his peculiar fascination upon the London public.

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[1] Hazlitt in the "Round Table" in the *Examiner*, Jan. 5, 1817.

Robertson, who was to do most to dethrone him, thus described his manner:

> Conceive a boisterous, blatant fellow in a green coat and brass buttons, buckskin breeches and boots, or in a blue frock, white waistcoat, and straw-colored continuations, always talking at the top of his voice, slapping you heavily on the back, laughing for five minutes consecutively, jumping over the chairs and tables, haranguing a mob from your drawing-room window, going down upon his knees to your daughter or your wife, or both, kissing your servant maid, borrowing your loose cash, and introducing a sheriff's officer to your family as an old college friend, and you form some idea of the type of animal the dramatic writers of the last century forced upon the public as the beau ideal of the gentleman, a blood, and "a fine fellow, sir, by God."[1]

It is by no means true, however, as Filon asserts,[2] that there was no change in the type of dandy, except in costume, from the "macaroni" of 1770 to the light rôles created by Robertson. Although we may grant that the type persisted until the time of Robertson, it is not at all true that it remained unchanged. Under the influence of Charles Mathews, especially, as we shall presently see, it was considerably modified from its original exaggeration to a figure in many particulars vividly natural. Nor was the change merely in dress.

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[1] "Theatrical Lounger" (*Illustrated Times*). Reprinted in *Life and Writings of T. W. Robertson.*

[2] *The English Stage*, p. 5.

Before we leave the earlier types of comic art, we must glance at a few individualized varieties. The heroine of comedy was essentially the same, whatever her name or rôle. She had to be sprightly, good-looking, forward, and possessed of a considerable overflow of sentiment. In the early days of the century, Mrs. Jordan was usually considered the most successful comedy heroine. Leigh Hunt says of her: "Mrs. Jordan is a performer who unites great comic powers with much serious feeling and who in all her moods seems to be entirely subservient to her heart, is not only the first actress of the day, but, as it appears to me from the descriptions we have of former actresses, the first that has adorned our stage." He deplores her frequent assumption of masculine rôles, known as "breeches parts," for he thinks, "this male attire of actresses is one of the most barbarous and unnatural customs of the stage." Her failure to be a first-rate lady he attributes in part to this immodesty. Hardly a single lady, Hunt declares, could be found on the London stage.[1]

Among the low comedian rôles were a few strongly marked types: the sailor, the farmer, the old man, and the Irishman or foreigner. Incledon and T. P. Cooke were the great impersonators of the British tar. There was a crude exaggerated realism about them, which, in the midst of much artificiality, went home to the hearts of the sea-worshipping British. Their songs — especially those of Incledon — and their rugged sentimentality, especially that of Cooke's William in *Black-eyed Susan*, were among the most popular of all the stage entertainments of the period.

Among the actors of rustic parts, Liston and Emery were easily the chief. In this type, as in that of the sailor, an approach to nature was more effective than in most low comedy parts. Hunt declares that Emery was himself a rustic by nature as well as on the stage. He was equally good in serious and comic parts. His Caliban was one of the greatest. Emery was "more skilled in the habits and cunning of rusticity;" Liston, "in its simplicity and ignorance."

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[1] *Critical Essays*, 1807, p. 168.

The Irishman, who during the first few decades of the century had been used largely for burlesque effect, was given a more or less sympathetic treatment in the impersonations of Tyrone Power, whose Dennis Bulgruddery in *John Bull*, in 1828, was a revelation to the London public as well as to himself.

The most important of these types was that of the old man. Perhaps this, more nearly than any other, approached the moderation of nature. In the early century Dowton was the master in this field, and later, Farren. Leigh Hunt records that Dowton's Sir Anthony and Old Dornton were wonderful, for his genius lay in the portrayal of old age verging on the tragic. "The accuracy of his study" was remarkable even in an age when "accuracy" was the cant term for histrionic excellence.

More eminent yet was William Farren. There can be little truth in Filon's sweeping statement that he played old men's parts "for fifty years without advancing in his art a step, without introducing a shade of emotion, or a touch of humanity into his effects." There must, indeed, have been something magic about an actor who could succeed for fifty years on any such formula. His contemporaries, at least, had a very different opinion of him. Hazlitt, in 1820, considered him the "only high-class comedian on the stage." [1] Leigh Hunt regarded him as "admirable in Sir Peter," better even than Thomas King who had created the part.[2] A writer in the *Theatrical Journal*,[3] who had lived through the Robertsonian revolution, declared that "Bouffé was perhaps the only comedian whom I ever have seen more near the perfectly natural than our own Farren was."

[1] *London Magazine*, no. 8, Aug. 20.

[2] *Tatler*, Oct. 27, 1830.

[3] April 6, 1870.

We have thus reviewed a few of the more frequent types of comedy figures in the early years of the century. For the most part they were clear-cut, conventional, and unnatural. Among them, however, were to be found many sketches from real life — a remote suggestion of a more vital comedy of manners. This was true even in some of the more conventional characters, like that of the light comedian. It was far truer of individual actors who either broke away from the restrictions of types or else raised those types, as did Charles Mathews, Junior, to standards approaching sincerity and nature. To such instances we shall now turn our attention. They were partly in the field of comedy, farce, and burlesque, but more conspicuously, perhaps, in that of melodrama. For the present we shall consider merely those realistic tendencies which showed themselves strongly in comedy.

In the very earliest years of the century there were actors whom all the critics put into a class by themselves because of their realism. Conspicuous among these was Simmons, of whom Leigh Hunt declared that, although he was an actor of modest range, nevertheless he was wonderfully real and simple, and "was fit for a better age of writers."[1] Hazlitt called him "one of the most correct, pointed, naïve, and whimsical actors we have for a long time had or are likely to have again. He was not a buffoon, but a real actor. He did not play himself nor play tricks, but played the part he was acting. He fitted into it like a brilliant into the setting of a ring, or as the ring fits the finger."[2] Similarly Hunt appreciates the acting of Miss Pope, who, it is interesting to note, was a pupil of the Garrick School of Acting.[3] She could, he tells us, "please without the least tincture of grimace or buffoonery, or the slightest opposition to nature . . . in true comic humor, and in a temperate unaffected nature she yields to no actress on the stage."[1] Even Bannister, an early favorite in low comedy, whom Hunt regarded "the first" on the stage, appears to have had some of the attributes of a realistic actor. We are told that he behaved "as if the audience composed a fourth wall"; that "heartiness" was his chief excellence. His versatility is remarked, his range extending from a wonderful presentation of sailor parts to an equally remarkable performance of Bob Acres.

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[1] *Critical Essays*, 1807.

[2] *London Magazine*, no. 1, Jan., 1820.

[3] The Garrick Juvenile Theatre.

Decidedly the most important and the most interesting of these early individualists were Charles Mathews, Senior, and William Elliston. It would be wrong to consider either a realist in an absolute sense. Each, however, had strong realistic tendencies, and in some moments, perhaps, and in some entire rôles, each was vividly natural.

The elder Mathews is one of the most interesting of those who stood somewhat apart from the common run of comedians. In spite of his individuality, he showed more distinctly, perhaps, than the rest, the peculiar influence, upon the art of the actor, of the stage routine and more especially of the popular taste. Indeed, he appears to have begun with a fine spirit of artistry, and to have ended in much the same vein as that of conventional comedians.

In the *Critical Essays* for the *News*, in 1804, Leigh Hunt declared that he carefully avoided buffoonery and confined himself to "a chastened and natural humor." He said further, "He has not the air of one who elevates his sensation the moment he enters the stage and drops it the instant he departs." "The principal fault," he thought, "is a redundancy of bodily motion approaching restlessness." Hazlitt, reviewing his work later, finds very few of these nicer qualities. By that time Mathews had abandoned the regular stage and confined his appearance to what he called "At Homes," given usually at the English Opera House (the Lyceum). These were in direct line of

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[1] *Critical Essays*, 1807, p. 144.

Charles Mathews, Senior, watching his own Performance of four Characters

From a contemporary painting

descent from the Samuel Foote "Dish of Tea," and for somewhat the same purpose, for they enabled Mathews to play in the middle of winter at an illegitimate theatre. They were merely monologues and impersonations, partly narrative and partly dramatic. In them, of course, he departed entirely from the set types of comedy and therefore introduced what later would have been called "character acting." This is how it appeared to Hazlitt:

> Mr. Mathews shines particularly neither as an actor nor as a mimic of actors, but . . . his forte is a certain general tact and versatility of comic power. You would say he is a clever performer. You would guess that he is a cleverer man. [His] felicitous strokes are casual and intermittent . . . they proceed from him rather by chance than by design, and are followed up by others equally gross and superficial. Mr. Mathews wants taste or has been spoiled by the taste of the times, "whom he must live to please and please to live." . . . He surprises oftener than satisfies. His wit does not move the muscles of the mind, but like some practical jokes gives one a good rap on the knuckles or a lively box on the ear.
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> He is in a continual hurry and disquietude to please, and destroys half the effect in trying to increase it. . . .
>
> He is afraid to trust for a moment to the language of nature and character and wants to translate it into pantomime and grimace, like a writing master who, for the letter *I*, has the hieroglyphic of an eye staring you in the face.
>
> There is something dry and meagre in his jokes. They do not "lard the lean earth as he walks." . . .
>
> Take from Mr. Mathews' drollest parts an odd shuffle in the gait, a restless volubility of speech and motion, a sudden suppression of features, or the continual repetition of some cant phrase, with an abated vigor, and you reduce him into an almost total insignificance and state of still life.
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> His best imitations are taken from something characteristic or absurd that has struck his fancy or occurred to his observation in real life — such as, a chattering footman, or surly traveller, or a garrulous old Scotch woman. This last we should fix upon as Mr. Mathews' *chef d'œuvre*. It was a por-

> trait of common nature equal to Wilkie or Teniers — as faithful, as simple, as delicately humorous, and with a slight dash of pathos; but without one particle of vulgarity, caricature, or ill nature.[1]

Pückler-Muskau has given us a less critical but more vivid picture of Mathews's performances.[2]

> Imperceptibly he passed from the narrative style to a perfectly dramatic performance in which with almost inconceivable talent and memory he placed before the eyes of his audience all that he had witnessed; while he so totally altered his face, speech, and whole exterior, with the rapidity of lightning, that one must have seen it to believe it possible.
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> The principal persons . . . were an old Englishman who found fault with everything abroad and praised everything at home, a provincial lady who never walked in the street without a French dictionary in her hand, who worried passers-by with incessant questions, seized upon every opportunity to assist other English people with her superior knowledge, in doing which as may be imagined, she stumbled upon the most perverted burlesque and often equivocal expressions. . . . The most amusing to me was an English lecture on Craniology by Spurzheim, the likeness to that person, so well known in England, — to his whole manner and his German accent, — was so perfect that the theatre shook with incessant laughter.

What Mathews's less felicitous moments were appears also from a Pückler-Muskau vignette.[3] The performance was a "monologue farce" or what was sometimes called a "polymonologue."

> At first he is a French tutor who is going to travel with a little lord ten years old, whom he shuts into his guitar case in order that he may save the fare on the diligence, and at the same time charge it to the papa. At every stage he takes him out to give him air and make him say his lessons. He carries on the conversation with infinite drollery and surprising skill as a ventriloquist. The boy's resistance to being shut into the box

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[1] Hazlitt, *London Magazine*, no. 5, May, 1820.

[2] *Tour of a German Prince*, iii, letter 4, Dec. 8, 1826.

[3] *Ibid.*

> again, the way in which his murmurs and complaints die away, like the waltz in *Die Freischütz*, until at length the lid is clapped on, and the last tones come from the case like a faint echo, are inconceivably comic. . . .
>
> The whole affair [concludes the Prince] is, as you perceive, not exactly æsthetic, and rather fitted to an English stomach than to any other. It is, indeed most painful to see such skill devoted to such absurd buffoonery.

Mathews is of great interest to the student of the early-century stage art, for he seems to reveal in his own personality, and in its reaction to the conditions of the stage, almost all the ingredients of popular comic art at this period. There was in him, however, a disposition to be naturally individual. He clearly showed that he had talent to be realistic in an almost photographic sense: at the same time, he had learned from twenty years of actual stage life that he must temper his naturalism to the taste of the public, which had a strong predilection for caricature and clownishness. Undoubtedly his influence told strongly in the growth of an easier, more vividly natural, comic style, which appeared first in his son, and which, long before 1860, had completely changed the tone of comedy acting.

In William Elliston, who perhaps was the greatest interpreter of comedy in the early years of the century, we have at once a more normal and a more richly endowed artist. As an actor, he seems to have been nearly perfect according to the standards of the day, and in many respects he was in advance of them. He was of the general species of light comedian, but barriers of class were far too rigid to do his versatility justice. Not only was he the greatest Ranger, Archer, Marlow, Doricourt, Charles Surface, Rover, Tangent of his day, but he was also the greatest Falstaff within the memory of all observers. He could even succeed in tragedy. Leigh Hunt as well as the public thought his Sir Edward Mortimer better than

Kemble's,[1] and declared: "His is the only genius that has approached that great actor Garrick in the universality of imitation."

The classification "genteel comedy" was applied to his art, a type which Hunt defines as "that character which attracts the regard of the fair and the fashionable, and that, in the happiest point of view, unites the most natural attractiveness of social pleasure with the nicest repellents of gross familiarity."

He was the early-century "matinée idol." Unluckily for him, there were no matinées. Hunt considered his acting in the *Honeymoon* one of the three perfect performances on the stage: Kemble's as Penruddock and Mrs. Siddons as Queen Katherine were the other two. Said Hunt, "Mr. Elliston was the best comedian in the highest sense of the word that we have ever seen."[2] Bestow, the editor of the *Theatrical Journal*, writing as late as 1863,[3] — Elliston died in 1831, — remembered him as "the best actor in genteel comedy" that he ever saw.

His special field of excellence was his gentlemanly rakes in high comedy.

> He understood [said Hunt] all the little pretended or avowed arts of a gentleman, when he was conversing, or complimenting, or making love, everything which implied the necessity of attention to the other person and a just and, as it were, a mutual consciousness of the graces of life. His manner had the true minuet dance spirit of gentility — the knowledge of how to give and take, with a certain recognition of the merits on either side, even in the midst of raillery. And then his voice was remarkable, for a union of the manly with the melodious; as a lover nobody approached him.[4]

Hazlitt, while perhaps less enthusiastic about his genius, conveys very much the same impression of his style: "Whatever requires spirit, animation, or the lively expression of natural feelings, he does well."[1] Later, in 1820,[2] he described him as

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[1] *Critical Essays*, p. 180.

[2] *Tatler*, July 10, 1831.

[3] Jan. 14.

[4] *Tatler*, July 10, 1831.

> an actor of great merit and of a very agreeable class; there is a joyousness in his look, his voice and manner, he treads the stage as if it were his best found and latest as well as earliest choice. . . . [He] hits the town between wind and water, between farce and tragedy, touches the spring of a mock heroic sentiment with due pathos and vivacity, and makes the best strolling gentleman or needy poet upon the stage.

In Elliston there was probably the nearest approach to an ideal type of acting in the comedy of manners during the early century. Obviously his style was not that of literal realism, but, on the other hand, it seems to have had less of the horse-play and exaggeration than that of any other comedian of the day. So fresh and individual was his method that he was regarded as the founder of a school of acting called by his own name and thought of as the ideal of "genteel comedy." It was, perhaps, the most hopeful sign, in the first two decades of the century, that a better taste in comedy was in progress of development.

Such was the mark of advance made in English comedy previous to 1820. Although coarseness and buffoonery were still its leading characteristics, there were a few actors who set themselves artistic ideals and who served eminently in making these nicer standards popular. Had comedy not been strongly influenced by other types, especially melodrama and burlesque, it is likely that, of itself, it would have developed toward a more realistic style. It was not free to do so. Burlesque and melodrama were fast pushing it aside. Both abounded in the comic and at the same time afforded a fresher and more actual picture of life than was to be found in the traditional comedy of the passing age. From the beginning of the century, and indeed much earlier, these types had gradually encroached upon the rightful field of comedy. Not only were they the support of the minor theatres, but they had taken a firm position upon the major stages as well; for, although they were generally given as afterpieces, they were not infrequently the most popular part of the program. In 1830 the triumph of these vulgar entertainments was complete. The development of English comedy was accordingly arrested. This was certainly the case in literature. Whatever comedies were produced from 1820 to 1840 and 1841 — the years of Bulwer's *Money* and Boucicault's *London Assurance* — were either light French farces and burlesques, or else melodramas. Of the latter type were the so-called comedies of Knowles and Bulwer and the plays of Jerrold's early period. Bulwer and Knowles gave London melodrama of a highly romantic color. Jerrold was content to clothe it in the humbler garb of the domestic or sentimental comedy. It was a period of type chaos. A genuine comedy of manners was the one thing that did not go into the curious blendings of these troublous years.

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[1] *Examiner*, June 3, 1815.

[2] *London Magazine*, no. 1, Jan. 1820.

In the meantime, as usual, acting followed its own course, fitting itself into the complex conditions along lines of easiest resistance, and these lay through burlesque and melodrama; therefore we must look to these types for the growth of influences which in time were to regenerate the stage. We shall first consider the developments in the type of burlesque of which Vestris and Charles Mathews, Junior, were the chief exponents; then follow the line of progress in the acting of melodrama from Wallack to Fechter; and finally consider the growth of the Robertsonian type of acting evolved from both of these.

Chapter XV

THE STREAM OF LIFE ON THE STAGE ACTING IN BURLESQUE AND THE NEWER COMEDY

WE have frequently referred to the wretched conditions at the minor theatres in which the "burletta" came into popularity with the masses. At the major theatres burlesque had continued essentially unchanged since the production of the *Beggar's Opera* and Fielding's work at the Haymarket. Since comedy had itself become farcical and even burlesque in acting, it is easy to imagine that the art of burlesque had passed all limitations of moderation. In 1819, however, a new tendency made itself felt. In that year Vestris first came prominently before the London public in a burlesque by Moncrieff called *Don Giovanni in London*. There was nothing surprisingly new in the burlesque itself, but the brilliancy of Vestris's pert acting in the "breeches part" of Don Giovanni was the sensation of its day. The success of the production was unparalleled. The secret of the success, however, lay more in Vestris's personal charm than in the merits of the composition. From the point of view of stage art, there was in her performance a more important attractiveness — that of artistry and moderation. In burlesque the substitution of genuine charm for that of wild exaggeration was a most important step.

Moncrieff followed his first great success with another, even more astonishing, that of *Tom and Jerry*, which was a reproduction of the type of the *Beggar's Opera*. The burlesque was conceived and acted with the most minute attention to realistic effect. It was an attempt to do on the stage what Hogarth and Cruikshank did in their sketches, and what Pierce Egan was attempting, with less art, in literature. The acting of Wrench, Reeve, Wilkinson, Keeley, and Walburn was regarded as wonderfully true to life. Edmund Kean declared that he had never seen anything equal to it. An actor from a rival company believed a real dustman had been engaged to act one of the parts, and left the theatre in disgust. In 1821 *Tom and Jerry* ran for three hundred nights at the Adelphi, and was repeated the following year at seven other theatres, thus establishing a record that was for many years unbroken.

This revival of the *Beggar's Opera* type seems not to have led to important results. The *Giovanni in London*, however, was the beginning of a most powerful current of influence. Its rise, as we have noted, was in Vestris herself. She was, for nearly twenty years, almost without a rival in the field of light farce and burlesque, especially those kinds in which music played a major part. During the first ten years of her popularity she was content, very much like Marie Wilton many years later at the Strand, merely to charm. Pückler-Muskau describes her in this stage of her development as follows:[1]

> The notorious Madame Vestris, who formerly made furor, was also there. She is somewhat *passée*, but still very fascinating on the stage. She is an excellent singer and still better actor, and a greater favorite of the English public even than Liston. Her great celebrity, however, rests on the beauty of her legs.
>
> The grace and exhaustless spirit and wit of her acting are also truly enchanting, though she sometimes disgusts one by her want of modesty and coquettes too much with the audience.

He testifies to her knowledge of the foreign languages and says that, "in the character of the German broom girl, she sings '*Ach du lieber Augustin*' with a perfect pronunciation."

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[1] *Tour of a German Prince*, iii, letter 6.

In spite of the imputation of coarseness which the Prince with perfect justice makes in his letter, Vestris was far more refined than anyone who had appeared in such rôles since the beginning of the century. Indeed, refinement was to be the key-note in the celebrated series of managements in which, from 1830 until her retirement in 1854, she was to do more for the improvement of the English comic art than any one person. We have already examined her work as a lessee in relation to the general currents of stage progress. It now remains for us to think of it merely as it affected the style of acting which, after 1830, largely replaced the old comedy style and by 1865 had developed into genuine comedy under Marie Wilton and Robertson.

In the Olympic Theatre, which she opened in 1831, she for the first time had an opportunity to put into effect, according to her own tastes, the style of acting for which she was to remain popular for more than two decades longer. It is not easy to construct for ourselves an image of her stage manner. Almost all the reviewers of her acting contented themselves with praising her appearance, her voice, her gay costumes, her archness, her familiarity, and, in the main, her good taste. As an actress she seems not to have impressed anyone with strongly distinguishing qualities. The most careful analysis of her acting that I have seen is that presented by Westland Marston in *Our Recent Actors*.[1] He had during the years of her progress as a manager watched with the keenest interest all the performers in London, and he himself had taken an active part in theatrical affairs. No one, I believe, has left a more thorough or more accurate study of the styles of acting current in London after 1830.

"In spite of her natural gifts," he says, "she had as a singer never gained a very high position. As an actress, criticism had never very largely credited her with the power of painting character with depth or subtlety." In another passage he states that "she had no title . . . to claim an eminent position either as vocalist or actress. . . . She had, however, with playgoers such great popularity that to seek for the grounds of it may not be uninteresting."

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[1] Vol. ii, pp. 140 ff.

Marston then enumerates the salient features of her style:

1. In ballad singing her voice had great expression, charmingly arch and vivacious.

2. Her costuming, even in rustic and humble characters, was exquisite, but, says Marston, "a silk skirt, a lace-edged petticoat, a silk stocking, a shoe of satin or patent leather would never have been worn by some of the characters she impersonated."

3. She cultivated a "personal understanding with the audience."

4. "Although in the delivery of dialogue she could hardly be called keen or brilliant, she knew what mischief and retort meant." Her Lady Teazle was "fairly good, though superficial," and her Catherine in Knowles's *Love* was "very good." Her Grace Harkaway in *London Assurance*, "lacked the necessary touch of sentiment." Marston concludes with the statement that her claims as an actress rested chiefly upon "a union of elegance and mirth in which she never failed to excel," and he thinks her "probably more fascinating than any of her time."

Vestris as an actress clearly lacked the essentials of greatness. Several facts, however, should be borne in mind in estimating her style. Until 1843 she had been confined by law to the acting of "burlettas." Perhaps her initial success even more strongly than the law had condemned her to this kind of art. Her training, until she was well past middle life, had been almost wholly in dancing,

Madame Vestris (*centre*) and Liston (*right*) in a Scene from "Paul Pry"

From an engraving of a painting by Clint

singing, and "illegitimate" drama. Furthermore, in managing as well as performing, she was ambitious to purge the popular art of its grossness and tasteless absurdities. She could not hope to reform all the failings of popular art, but she could moderate them by a delicacy of wit and humor, by careful and tasteful costuming, and by the bearing and graces of good society. These changes in themselves were all in the direction of realism, when compared with the atrocities in comedy which had frequently been seen on the London stage.

Had her reputation with the public, her own temperament as an actress, and the vexatious monopoly allowed, she might have attained to the position of the most significant pioneer producer, if not performer, of realistic comedy in England. Her claims to distinction are greater, I believe, than is usually assumed by students of the drama. Her triumph in the production of *London Assurance*, had she no other claim to greatness, gives her rightful precedence in the conception of a new comic art. The chances were all against her ultimate success. Her popularity was no longer at its height, her habits and her mannerisms had become fixed; worse than all, she had become the willing slave of the public, who would not have her in any other parts than those enjoyed by force of habit. We catch a glimpse of an unsuspected depth in her art only a few years before she left the stage. Lewes in the *Leader* for December 7, 1850, wrote as follows of her assumption of a tragic rôle:[1]

> The lasting astonishment is that Vestris should perform it as no actress of our stage could do it! That is something to marvel at. Vestris, the greatest pet of the public, will startle even her greatest admirers in this part, for assuredly no one ever believed her powers lay at all in that direction. Yet I assure you that her acting is quite a study. . . . I declare that the acting of Vestris and Charles Mathews in the new piece

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[1] In the *Day of Reckoning*, adapted from *L'Enfant de Paris*.

> gave me more unmixed delight — more exquisite enjoyment — than I have for a long time received from the English stage. All the freshness of early enjoyment came back upon me, and no boy ever relished his first play more.
>
> Vestris and Charles Mathews were *natural* — nothing more, nothing less. They were a lady and gentleman such as we meet with in drawing-rooms, graceful, quiet, well-bred, perfectly dressed, perfectly oblivious of the footlights. . . . I carry away from the theatre an exquisite picture on which it is delightful to dwell, which reflection tells me was perfect art.

Making all allowances for the changes in standards of realism between Lewes's period and our own, we are forced to recognize in the work of Vestris a significant spirit of realistic action beyond any previous achievement of the century. She sought by every means at her disposal to put scenes from life before the public. As we have already shown in the chapter on her management, she introduced contemporary manners and appropriate dress in her Olympic burlesques. Before she ended her career twenty years later, she had applied the same principles to modern comedy and even to tragedy. Her despised art of burlesque had wielded a potent influence. The marvel of the times was that out of it, probably more than out of any form of dramatic art, came the impulses toward realism in acting which culminated in the Robertsonian revolution. Foremost, then, among the creators of the refined burlesque art was Madame Eliza Lucy Bartolozzi Vestris.

In all her work she was aided by the sympathetic cooperation of her husband, Charles Mathews, the younger. His reasons for joining Vestris in her Olympic management we have already stated.[1] Only at that theatre, he said, out of all in London in 1835, could he put into practice the kind of acting which, as the son of a great realistic actor, he had appropriated as his own. This style he defined in his *Autobiography* as "the lighter phase of comedy

[1] Page 223.

representing the more natural and less labored school of modern life, and holding the mirror up to nature without regard to the conventionalities of the theatre."

In short, the light comedian of the early comedy was by a sudden metamorphosis turned into Charles Mathews, very much as the low comedian had been epitomized in Liston. From his début in 1835 until his retirement and death in 1878, he was *par excellence* the light comedian of London, and that by nature. There might occasionally arise a Wigan or a Lacy to share with him the honors, but all of them combined could not win the popularity that he monopolized almost without a break throughout his long and active but irresponsible career. He prided himself upon the fact that his art did not change.

> It has been urged against me [he complained in the days of the Bancrofts] that I always play the same characters in the same way and that ten years hence I should play the parts exactly as I play them now. This I take as a compliment. It is a precision that has been aimed at by the models of my profession which I am proud to follow, and shows, at least, that my acting is the result of art and study and not that of mere accident.

Probably no one in London, except Vestris herself, influenced so strongly the trend of pre-Robertsonian stagecraft. Not the least significant of the happenings in this complex period was the fact that Robertson in his early days served as of Charles Mathews's prompter.

We need, then, to have clearly in mind the exact style of acting of which Mathews was the exponent. We must recall first that it was developed almost exclusively in the burlesque school of representation. Except for the Vestris–Mathews management of Covent Garden from 1839 to 1842, and for the period of sensation from 1860 to 1870, Mathews was seen almost exclusively in burlesque or light farcical comedy. We need first to make clear the connection of his art with the light comedy type of the previous generation. How his manner differed from the earlier is clearly though perhaps strongly set forth by Baker, who says:

> His style was new and was entirely opposed to the stage traditions that still ruled the dramatic world and were to rule it for many years to come. His light comedy was a different thing from that of the *outré* dressed, swaggering, back-slapping, restless, loud-talking gentleman who then possessed the stage; it was the most perfect blending of art and nature, or rather it was the most perfect example of perfect art the English stage had ever known. Mathews did not, as superficial observers used to say, do and talk precisely as a man would in the privacy of his own drawing-room. . . . No actor can tread the stage without imparting a certain artificial coloring and polish to his creation, unless he would have his efforts condemned as crude and unnatural.[1]

His acting, like that of Vestris, was fashioned on the new French *vaudeville* model. Both were constant visitors in Paris, and their productions were derived chiefly from the French through that insatiable translator and adapter, J. R. Planché. After 1815, French companies had played in London such plays as Scribe's *La Haine d'une Femme*, and Picard's *Les Cinque Filles à Marier*, and a little opera, *Le Tableau Parlant*, music by Guitry. Some were from Scribe, but most of them were adaptations from what in France were called *folies*, *féeries*, and *revues*. The *folie* differed from the coarse burlesque of the English stage. It combined some familiar fairy tale with the ordinary burlesque material of clown and Columbine, and often possessed a pleasing literary quality. The *revue* was merely a topical burlesque, in which some current matter of interest was set forth in spirit of burlesque.[2]

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[1] *History of the London Stage*, p. 263.

[2] Although the *Olympic Revels*, by Dance and Planché, which began Vestris's management, was rather in the old type of burlesque than in the new, its success was soon followed by an adaptation of Planché's made from a

The first *revue*, an original one by Planché in the French form, was *Success: or, a Hit if You Like It*, given at the Adelphi December 12, 1825. Its object was to make fun of the theatrical successes of the day. In it figured an ex-tragedian, Polichinelle, Paul Pry, Long Tom Coffin, Jocko, and the various London journals.

The literary delicacy in such pieces made possible the Vestris innovations at the little Olympic Theatre. It at once raised her productions to a plane, not only far above the ordinary pantomime and burlesque of the day, but also above much that had passed for comedy. It was Planché's belief that the highest effect could be produced in these burlesques by having the acting perfectly natural and familiar, so that the contrast between the absurdity of the thing said and the propriety of the everyday behavior of the speakers should greatly heighten the comic effect. Thus a new realistic technique was introduced into burlesque before it was given a trial in comedy. Indeed, its appearance in the "vulgar" pieces of minor burlesque may have delayed its adoption in legitimate comedy.

When Vestris and Mathews had established this technique in burlesque and musical farce, they did all in their power to extend it to the legitimate stages of Covent Garden and the Haymarket, and later at the Lyceum they applied it to the more serious types of French plays.

Not only was Mathews's natural acting a revelation to the decade of the thirties, but it remained the most ad-

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genuine French *féerie*, *Riquet à la Houpe*, by Saurin and Brazier. The relation of the French type of burlesque to the type that had previously been known in London, Planché defines in his introduction to this piece, Englished as *Riquet with the Tuft*. As long as he could remember, "Nursery tales and the Arabian Nights had furnished the Easter and Christmas pantomimes." "All these," he adds, "including my own lucubrations, were treated seriously, and presented to the public simply as grand 'spectacles.' The *folies féeries* of the French stage were a vastly different affair; sparkling with wit, pregnant with refined satire, exquisite whim, and the delightful persiflage which is the special charm of the French fairy tales of the 18th century."

vanced naturalism on the stage up until at least 1860. For instance, in 1852 G. H. Lewes wrote: "What our actors want, and what they might learn from the French, is the drawing-room quietness of well-bred acting, the subordination of points to character — the reliance upon nature. . . . It is in this that Charles Mathews surpasses all the English actors and has gradually earned for himself his peculiar reputation."

Here are a few of Westland Marston's critical opinions of Mathews's art. His impersonation of Captain Smike in Jerrold's *Bubbles of the Bay* was "a very lifelike bit of acting. . . . the insolent mendacity of an unscrupulous adventurer being hit off in a manner as natural as it was telling, and his share of the dialogue given with a happy carelessness which brings out the wit and humor of a part, without obvious intention." Speaking in general, and comparing Mathews with the later actors of comedy, probably the Robertsonian, Marston declared:

> Moderation was a large element in [his] success. Mathews' was not that so-called moderation, which is a weak compromise between extravagance and tameness; it was the desire to keep close to the truth, to adhere strictly to the sentiments, the habits of a typical man of the day.
>
> In the careless air with which he extracts money from a domestic, in the bland superiority with which he defends his meanness to his wife by showing her that fortune at times turns upon the most trifling pivot; in the look of conviction with which he hoodwinks the rapacious Hardacre; in the assumed *hauteur* with which he daunts the coarse but cunning Grossmark — there was not a tone, a look, or a gesture which might not have been employed by a city man of the time.

Great as Mathews's genius was, Marston affirms that it was confined to the line of light comedy parts; but within this class, he was unquestionably master. "For ease and gentlemanly bearing, for coolness in the face of difficulty, for a happy self-abandonment to a humorous impulse, at

Charles Mathews, Junior, in a Light Comedy Rôle

times for elegant languor, or mischievous love of frolic, — all shown with the art that conceals art, — he had, perhaps, no equal in his lifetime."

There is no escape from the conclusion that a very realistic type of acting had appeared in the London theatres many years before the Bancroft management at the Prince of Wales's. The flaw in the stage picture was not so much in the acting as in the plays. In burlesque, in comedy, and in farce, there prevailed the same spirit of exaggeration and whimsicality that sought to amuse more by its extravagance than by its interesting representation of real men and real events. In Jerrold's better comedies, like the *Bubbles of the Day* and *Time Works Wonders*, in Bulwer's *Money* and in Boucicault's *London Assurance* there was a suggestion of the advance made in the actor's art during the previous decades; but such work looked backward rather than forward for its inspiration, and its realistic novelty was merely a compromise with tradition. English dramatists before Robertson had not succeeded in writing plays which should allow actors of the new school full scope. Such artists as Vestris and Mathews had to look for material where only it could be found — in the fantasies, the comedies, the light farces of France. The most baneful influence of the day was the inclination on the part of many who worked for the uplift of the literary drama, to decry the French art and the realistic acting of Mathews as vulgar, and still to cling to the artificial style of traditional English comedy as the only means of dramatic salvation. At least three decades were to pass after the appearance of *London Assurance* before the critics of the old school could live down their prejudice. Robertson's secret of success was, perhaps, that he espoused the cause of French art and freely imitated it.

What the effect of these changes was on the trend of stage representation appears in an article published in the *Theatrical Journal* of May 31, 1865. "Style, even in comedy," says the writer, "is decidedly undergoing a revolution. The broad farce of a third of a century ago, when John Reeve was very popular, hardly exists — all is toned down."

A glance at a few of the more eminent comedians of the day will suffice to support this statement. Those who retained most characteristics of the old school of comedy were Keeley, Compton, Buckstone, and Webster. Against the last two especially the wrath of the Robertsonians was directed. Even in these performers there had been a great change from the methods of the early century. Keeley, who had been with Liston, sustained the low comedy parts in Madame Vestris's Olympic Theatre, and was celebrated for his quiet undemonstrative humor, "usually phlegmatic, impassive, and pathetically acquiescent in the droll inflictions which fate had in store for him." [1] His Verges in *Much Ado About Nothing* was a masterpiece, as were also his Dolly Spanker, in *London Assurance*, and his Peter Pall Mall in Jerrold's *Prisoner of War*.

Compton, like Keeley, was an actor of a mood that Marston defines as "pragmatical conceit of unconscious eccentricities sometimes combined with pathos and a self-satisfied stolidity." Marston says further: "Though the parts in which he modestly appeared were of a broad type, he showed human nature beneath them and proved himself a legitimate artist in eccentric comedy."

In Buckstone, more perhaps than in any other of the stage pets, the spirit of the early-century comedy survived. He was frankly what his own nature and the popular taste made him. There was, about his performance, little concern for art standards or for literary excellence. He knew that by blowing a trombone with his cheeks swelled he would delight the public, and for the time being all lesser considerations were forgotten.

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[1] Marston, *Our Recent Actors*, ii, 88.

> To carry drollery to its furthest point seemed the height of Buckstone's ambition [says Marston]. It would be untrue to say that he cared little for character. His genial people were ultra genial, his cowards thorough poltroons. His mischief-makers reveled in their sports. But it is quite true to say that character with him was quite subordinate to mirth . . . in almost every part he was Buckstone. It is equally true that the public did not want him to be any one else.

Particularizing in matters of his personality, Marston declares:

> Never was there a face more fitted to excite mirth — there being an expression of astuteness and self-restraint in the upper part of the face, while the lips and the lines from the somewhat expansive nose downwards seemed on the alert for a grin, giving a union of shrewdness and drollery. . . . He possessed a voice that now doled out in tones (at times nasal) of humorous languor, as if enjoying by anticipation the fun it was to produce and then surprised you by a loud triumphant burst as the point was made. . . . His chief drawback was his love of exaggeration.

There was in the work of this great comedian a frank survival of the spirit of the Liston and Munden artistry. The significance of this fact is borne in on us when we remember that it was the figure of Buckstone that loomed largest in the minds of Robertson and his followers when they inveighed against the comedy manners of their day. His position as manager of the Haymarket gave him an authority which it was most unfortunate for a man of his tendencies to wield. It was he who with perfect self-satisfaction could call Robertson's *Society* "rubbish" and whose condemnation of the play was ever afterwards thought by the Robertsonians to have saved it from certain failure at his theatre.

Webster, with whom Buckstone shared the comic throne during the early eighteen-sixties, was an artist of much finer feeling. Marston said of him: "In the sphere of what is called 'real life,' what variety and what distinction of conception were at Webster's command!"

In the *Roused Lion*,[1] his interpretation of Stanislas, Marston writes, was

> admirable not only in each phase of the character, in each detail of action, but in the ease and nature which gave unity and consistency to all his transitions. I remember the critic of an influential paper who was otherwise loud in the comedian's praise, charging him with a certain want of refinement. What seemed surprising to me, on the other hand, was the presence of this quality in an actor who had shone hitherto chiefly in rough and strong parts.

Of his acting of a drunkard's part in *Mind Your Own Business*, Marston writes: "He was equally striking and natural and truthful in each of his contrasting moods. . . . He eminently succeeded in making the position of the drunkard thoroughly pathetic and in so expressing the soul of goodness in things evil, that they became touching instead of repulsive."

His chief characteristics were "comprehensiveness of conception and nice gradation in the expression of feeling." Nowhere were these more billiantly shown than in Graves, in Lord Lytton's *Money*. Says Marston of this performance: "The Graves of Webster still remains uppermost in my mind as a being who, though somewhat exaggerated by the author, one might have met in the flesh." Hardly less remarkable were his Tartuffe, and his Triplet in *Masks and Faces*.

Making allowances for the fact that Marston was an admirer of Webster and that he was of a somewhat conservative point of view at the time of his writing in 1888, we must nevertheless feel in these nicely conceived criticisms the reflection of a style of acting which was not without its finer qualities, and qualities, moreover, of a realistic nature.

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[1] A piece adapted from *Le réveille du lion*, presented by Webster in 1847.

Keeley, Compton, Buckstone, and Webster we may, then, consider representative of the earlier type of comedy acting which had lasted down into the time of the Robertsonian innovations. Although in Buckstone there seems to have been no marked advance over his predecessors, we are forced to conclude that with many actors of the day there was comparatively little of the early-century comic manner left. On the other hand, their general tone and their personal peculiarities were in the direction of moderation, refinement, and even nature.

With these prominent figures on the London stages, naturally lesser ones had come completely under the new influences. Such, for instance, in the eighteen-fifties, were Lacy and Wigan, who shared with Mathews the honors of light comedian. Perhaps the most notable of these early realists was Mrs. Stirling, who was spoken of with admiration by all who wrote of her work. She was the original Peg Woffington in *Masks and Faces*. She enjoyed the distinction of being Thackeray's favorite actress, because, as he declared, "she was natural."[1] Of her Peg, Lewes wrote: "She was gay, natural, touching, loving, throughout and made one perfectly understand Ernest Vane's infatuation, though not his subsequent desertion of her for his wife."[2] One of the most significant facts connected with her career was her engagement with the Bancrofts as late as 1883, to play the Marquise in *Caste*. Even Mrs. Bancroft enthusiastically declared, "She played the part as it had never been acted." Thus, while her marvellous performance of Mrs. Malaprop connected her with the comedy of the past, her equally brilliant assumption of a minor Robertsonian rôle showed her complete identity with the new comedy.

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[1] See *Theat. Jour.*, May 31, 1865.

[2] *Leader*, Nov. 27, 1852.

Among the men who bridged over the two periods, perhaps Leigh Murray was the most conspicuous, although his affiliations with the new appeared not to have been so clear as those of Mrs. Stirling. Marston thus fixes him in his scale of comparison:

> In the interval between Mr. James Anderson, who in the early days was perhaps the best type of the romantic *jeune premier*, and the far more realistic *jeunes premiers* who may be said to have come in with the Robertsonian comedy, the late Mr. Leigh Murray may be said to hold a mediate position, with a decided leaning to the young men of the earlier school. . . . His comedy acting was marked by refined vivacity, as his serious acting was marked by refined feeling. In comedy, besides being true to the human nature of his part, he now and then showed a touch of realism from the habits of the day; but there was always significance in it — always suggestion of character. It was never mere ludicrous trick or grimacing.

Such, then, are a few of the instances of the development among comic actors of the old school. Even here, where, least of all, one might expect to find it, there had been advancement, even pronounced, in the direction of naturalistic impersonation — partly as the result of melodramatic influences from France, and partly because of the example of such men as Charles Mathews, who had raised the contemptible art of burlesque to the rank in popular esteem of refined comic acting. It is false and manifestly unfair to conclude, as does Filon, that

> these actors injured rather than served their art. They revelled in, and limited themselves to, their own specialty, exaggerated their idiosyncracies day by day, and left them as a legacy to their imitators. The authors were too insignificant, did they see their danger, to oppose their will to that of Charles Mathews and Farren. They took their measure to order and tried to satisfy their patrons.

This imputation of stagnation and tyranny on the part of early comedians was no more or less true than it might be of actors at any time and in any place. It was the populace, if anyone, and not the actors, who exerted a tyrannical influence upon the playwright. We should remember that Mathews and Vestris coöperated with Planché, in introducing to England the naturalistic burlesques which made that writer famous; and it was they, too, who encouraged Boucicault in his first endeavor to reform the written comedy style.

Even the Bancrofts' less radical statement conveys a somewhat unjust impression of the work that had previously been done in comedy.

> In those far-off days [they assert] there had been little attempt to follow nature, either in the plays or in the manner of producing them. With every justice was it argued that it had become a subject of reasonable complaint in reflective playgoers, that the pieces they were invited to see rarely afforded a glimpse of the world in which they lived. The characters were, for the most part, pale reflections of once substantial shapes belonging to a former state of theatrical existence, whilst the surroundings were often as much in harmony with the days of Queen Anne as with those of Queen Victoria. . . . The characters lived in an unreal world and the code of ethics on the stage was the result of warped tradition.[1]

There is in this moderate statement much unquestionable fact, and, indeed, it would be almost wholly true if more credit had been given for the remarkable advance which was everywhere to be found in the art of the actor away from the exaggeration and conventionality of the opening decades of the century. There was more than "pale reflections" in the refined realism of players like Mathews, Lacy, Wigan, Webster, and Leigh Murray, and of such women as Amy Sedgwick and Mrs. Stirling.

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[1] The *Bancrofts*, p. 83.

Literary composition, however, lagged far behind the spirit of the actor. Such pictures of real life as found their way to the English stage in those days came from France, and, as such, they were necessarily remote from life as Englishmen knew it.

The history of comedy after 1830 was not, as has often been assumed, one of complete stagnation. Its annals were full of activity, in which every conceivable influence, native and foreign, played its part. The two most noticeable results were the gradual weakening and final overthrow of the old type of comedy representation, and the substitution of a type of action, modern, artistic, and refined, which had already won its way to a favorable hearing, long before the opening of the Prince of Wales's Theatre under the Robertson–Bancroft régime. There were yet other manifestations of a new comedy spirit showing themselves in the Byron burlesques and in what was known as "eccentric" or "character" acting. These we shall consider together with the Robertsonian movement of which they were an integral part. In the meantime, we must turn our attention to the progress made in the acting of melodrama, the art, which, more than any other, determined the progress of English stagecraft.

Chapter XVI

THE STREAM OF LIFE ON THE STAGE
THE ACTING OF MELODRAMA

MELODRAMA in its finish is French, but in its materials and spirit truly English. Although the word had never been used before Jean Jacques Rousseau applied it to one of his works with musical accompaniment, — a piece, however, which had nothing but the music in keeping with our present conception of melodrama, — it is now applied with utmost freedom to works of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. What we in general mean by melodrama, I take it, is a plot which has little but its mechanics to recommend it, in which characters of impossible and conventional vices and virtues act with a kind of mathematical precision, but insufficient motivation, according to type, and in which, moreover, the most improbable situations are introduced to baulk the heroes, who similarly are extricated from their difficulties by the frankly exposed machinery of the plot — or, worse yet, of the stage mechanician. Of Jean Jacques's musical accompaniment, our stage preserves a touch of soft music with love scenes, or a suppressed quiver of the violins to accompany great excitement. Sensation we think of as melodrama's chief appeal; and its lack of subtlety as well as its abundance of improbability causes us to speak of it with pity when it has other merits, or with scorn when it has not. In somewhat this fashion we have conventionalized the term melodrama, and naturally we do not trouble ourselves about its origin.

The first time the term was used in English to designate a play on the London stage, it was spelled *melo-drame*, and was borrowed directly from the French as was the play to which it was applied, Holcroft's *Tale of Mystery*, which was a free translation from the first genuine French *melodrame*, *Coeline; ou l'enfant du mystère*, by Pixérécourt. Holcroft's version was produced under Kemble at Covent Garden, November 13, 1802. The occasion had all the zest and brilliancy of a new dramatic discovery, for never before had there been gathered together in a single piece on the English stage so much to appeal to the popular taste accompanied by so little to offset that appeal.

Although the finished product which made this novel impression was admittedly French, and frankly announced as such, its materials were quite as English as they were French. La Chaussée's *drame*, or *comédie larmoyante*, was probably traceable to the sentimental literature of England. Here was the groundwork of melodrama. This genre, nurtured in the Boulevard theatres, lent itself admirably to the sensational mood of audiences during the Revolution; but even the sensation with which it was then clothed was also traceable to English influence. The literature of mystery and horror, dating from Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1765) had made its appeal in France. The novels of Ann Radcliffe very obviously were the model for Ducray-Duminil's romance, from which Pixérécourt fashioned his *Coeline* — even part of the name, *l'enfant du mystère* was of English inspiration.

Long before this French product had found its way into English, a similar, though less complete, compilation of mystery, horror, and sensation — including scenic thrills — had been made in several plays. An afterpiece of this kind was produced by Kemble in his new theatre in 1794, in which a fortress was nightly stormed and burned. The first English piece to resemble closely the fully developed *melodrame*, was "Monk" Lewis's *Castle Spectre*, produced at Drury Lane in 1797.

Besides, the German melodramatic types of Kotzebue had received a hearing in London before 1802. *Menschenhass und Reue* was translated as *The Stranger* and maintained its popularity until the middle of the century. Queen Victoria selected it for a Windsor revival. From *Die Spanien in Peru* by the same author, Sheridan manufactured a most successful play of the type, *Pizarro*, which was in the repertory of every romantic actor during our period.

Our general conception of melodrama applies almost equally well to most of these productions. What, then, was the special novelty of the *Tale of Mystery* produced as a "melo-drame" at Covent Garden in 1802?[1]

Let us note, first, the impression it made on the reviewer in the *Times*. He mentions first of all the popular moral appeal in sharp character contrast: "The villainy and virtue of Romaldi and Fransciso are admirably contrasted." The compactness and ingenuity of the plot, however, carry him completely away:

> The attempts made by the former to get his brother into his power; and, failing that, to murder him, from effecting which he is prevented by Selina . . . the detection of Romaldi's wickedness, and the perseverence of the latter in effecting his revenge, with his pursuit and apprehension by the officers of justice; and the natural love and kind benevolent disposition of Francisco, will combine to produce an effect that has not been surpassed by any mixed combination of a similar nature since the English drama has attained to its present improved state.[2]

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[1] The outline of the plot is as follows. An all-virtuous father, whose tongue has been extracted by pirates, returns to find his daughter Selina a victim of his wicked brother's designs. To get possession of her inheritance — her father was believed to be dead — the brother must force her marriage with his son. He now plots to kill his mute brother, but Selina thwarts the plan. Failing in this scheme, he contrives to prevent the marriage of Selina with her own lover by introducing a forged proof that she is her father's bastard. She and her mute father are driven out in scorn. But justice triumphs. The villainy is discovered, and the villain, hounded through the forest, is caught in his own toils; the honor of the virtuous father and daughter is established, and her marriage with her own lover is the award of poetic justice.

[2] *Times*, Nov. 15, 1802.

The reviewer in the *Times* noted also another important advantage in the new type, and one that is especially significant in our present study, namely, the naturalness of the dialogue, concerning which he writes: "The sentiments are appropriate to the occasion, and the dialogue is natural and characteristic. There is no extravagance of idea — no laborious research after simile and metaphor, no display of pomp and inflated expression: the thought seems to arise from the moment, and the words appear to be suggested by the circumstances which pass under the eye of the spectator." Here was, indeed, a marked departure from the heavy adornment of the English tragic style.

The writer, condensing his impressions, declares: "An entertainment more distinguished for novelty and interest, more happily composed of fable, incident, dialogue, music, dancing, and pantomime, and more decidedly sanctioned by the approbation of an audience, has never been produced on the English stage."

Such was the auspicious beginning of technical melodrama in English. In popularity it almost at once erected itself into the chief menace of "the legitimate," and, as we have just seen, the triumph was on the stage of Covent Garden. With the rapid increase of scenic sensation, the managements, especially that of Covent Garden, came to count upon melodrama for financial support. With many of the minors, the melodrama became the chief stock in trade. Conspicuous among them, as we have already noted, were Sadler's Wells, the Surrey, especially under Dibdin, the Coburg under Davidge, and, chief of all, the Adelphi.

The reviewer also made the following comment on the acting: "We do not recollect any piece to the success of which the merits of the performers have so materially contributed as to that of *A Tale of Mystery*." Of Johnson's acting he wrote: "It was, from the commencement to the conclusion, a *chef-d'œuvre* which we despair of seeing equalled." And of Farley's performance of the pantomimic character of the dumb Francisco, he was obliged to clothe his critique in the words of Claudian: "*Nutu manibusque loquax.*"

The acting of melodrama, therefore, began at an apparently high degree of excellence. The most striking novelty was, of course, its musical accompaniment. Music, however, was in itself no stranger to acting. That it was used in a melodramatic sense in Sheridan's *Pizarro* is clear from the *Times* report: "The introduction of music in aid of tragic performance we know has been censured by the critics of high reputation, but it has been no less ably vindicated by others of distinguished rank." Nothing, however, to approach the elaborateness of the musical accompaniment of *A Tale of Mystery* had been known to a London audience, for we read again in the *Times*, "The hurry and the perturbation of the scene were forcibly depicted by the agitated notes of the orchestra, and this new adjunct to the interest of the drama was immediately felt by the whole audience."

A few of the stage directions for the use of the music will perhaps indicate best what effects were sought. They were taken from the first edition of Holcroft's play:

> Music to express discontent and alarm.
> Ditto to express chattering contention.
> Ditto to express pain and disorder.
>
> In the midst of rejoicing the clock strikes; the dancing [at the wedding] ceases; the changing music inspires alarm and dismay.
>
> Enter Malvoglio. He stops in the middle of the stage; the company starts up . . . all with more or less terror, the whole during a short pause forming a picture. Malvoglio then presents a letter to Bonamo, with a malignant assurance, and turns away, gratified by the consternation he has occasioned, with which audacious air and feeling, he retires. While

Bonamo opens the letter and reads with great agitation, the music expresses confusion, and pain of thought, then ceases.

Again we read:

> Music plays alarmingly, but *piano* when he enters and while he says, "I beg pardon, good sir, but — "
>
> (Music loud and discordant at the moment the eye of Montano catches the figure of Romaldi.)

Later there is a curious direction: "The shrieks of Selina join the music, which also shrieks, suddenly bringing Bonamo, Stephano, and servants through the folding doors."

Naturally the music made havoc during that great sensation scene at the end in which Francisco refuses to kill Grimaldi. In Horatian fashion, Romaldi fights on a bridge against a squad of archers, from whose darts he is shielded by the valor and mercy of those whom he has wronged, for they fling themselves between him and the archers.

The freshness of this new art form as observed by the audience was due to clear-cut characters, embodying simple vices and virtues; tense and economical dialogue which, although inflated, never allowed itself to wander from the action for merely literary purposes; startling contrasts both in character and action; and, above all, thrilling situations in which the physical played the major part, heightened to an appalling degree by the palpitations of the orchestra. The frank directness with which it produced its effects made its utter unreality seem real for the time being and its excessive artificiality seem simple.

Its spectacular possibilities were soon seized upon by the lessees of both the minor and major stages. To the thrill of situations set off by music were added the terrors of lakes and cascades, the prancing of horses, and the flare of volcanoes. For a time the artistic possibility of the melodrama was lost sight of in the excess of its accoutrements. With Moncrieff's *Rochester* and *The Diamond Arrow* in 1818, came a promise of better things at the minor theatres. In *Rochester* at the Olympic, Elliston himself acted with triumphant results. His influence, no doubt, was felt at other melodramatic houses.

Melodrama, however, first came to its own under the management of Terry and Yates at the Adelphi. During the season of 1823 to 1824, their lesseeship began. They aimed to accomplish for melodrama what later Vestris and Mathews did for burlesque. They civilized it and were (among the early producers) its most refined exponents. They gathered together such popular and skilled performers as Wrench, Reeve, T. P. Cooke, Tyrone Power, Mrs. Fitzwilliams, and Miss Brunton, who later became Mrs. Yates. The first furor of their management was T. P. Cooke's *Long Tom Coffin*, in an arrangement of Cooper's *Pilot*. It was a vivid sketch, conceived in a highly individual and realistic vein. He repeated its success in Fitzball's *Flying Dutchman* and Jerrold's *Black-eyed Susan*.

This more intimate and domestic type of melodrama, with marked realistic tendencies, came to be known as the "Adelphi drama." Buckstone, Jerrold, and Fitzball were the principal authors. Buckstone, whose *Luke the Labourer* Dr. McLeod believes to have been the first thoroughly English melodrama of the domestic type,[1] was followed by the *Wreck Ashore*, *Green Bushes*, and the *Flowers of the Forest*, and numberless other pieces ranging from the domestic of England to the romantic of France. If Buckstone was the first author of an English domestic melodrama, he was surely not the one to create for this manner of writing a success amounting to a revolution. This honor is Douglas Jerrold's, for although he may not have been the first to try the experiment, he was the first to win the heart of London for the domestic and domesticated melodrama. His *Black-eyed Susan* was by no means his first play of the new type. His *Ambrose Gwinett* had enjoyed a considerable popularity in the lesser world of the Coburg, before Jerrold revolted against the hated Davidge, and brought his more celebrated play to Elliston at the Surrey. To Jerrold was due, at least, the credit which he claimed of refusing to translate from the French. What he wrote was essentially original, if not always in plot, at least in treatment; and its effect was to open not only the minor but the major theatres as well to plays of the domestic melodramatic type. Still greater, no doubt, was the effect of this style of writing upon the stage picture created, for with vivid characters drawn from English life a manner of acting was developed which would not have been needed in the *Tale of Mystery* or *Valmondi*. With Buckstone, Charles Mathews, and Mrs. Stirling acting at the Adelphi from time to time, we may be sure that the work of the house, even in its early days, was far from contemptible. It is interesting to note that Cruchley's *Picture of London* in 1835 speaks of the Adelphi as "by far the most fashionably attended of all the minor theatres." Yates's own style of acting seems to have had no marked characteristics. At the time of his death, June 21, 1842, the *Theatrical Journal* speaks of him as

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[1] Unpublished thesis: *French Influence on English Drama during the First Forty Years of the Nineteenth Century*. Harvard Univ., 1914, p. 65.

> one of the most versatile performers on the stage, which may perhaps account for his having no decided forte. In tragedy, comedy, farce, and melodrama, he was occasionally capital and always respectable. In burlesque he was excellent, though perhaps a little too prone to exaggeration. He was a better buck than fop, and a better rake than either. He only wanted a little in refinement.

His wife, however, was clearly one of the forerunners of realism. Marston, writing many years later, still remembers the impression she made upon him when a young man by the simplicity of her manner. He thus describes her:

> There flits before me the figure of a slender elegant woman with a low expressive voice, capable of very subtle inflections. This actress struck me as being eminently gifted with quiet strength. Her power of this kind in sarcasm, bitterness, or intense grief, was truly remarkable. In the expression of these emotions, she did not seem to be acting: she spoke as a lady might have spoken in a drawing-room and moved you without a trace of effort. A scene at a masked ball to which she tracked her faithless husband and his mistress stands out in my recollection, though I have forgotten the details of that particular scene; and young as I was, I felt how widely Mrs. Yates's suggestive acting, in which feeling and intellect happily blended, separated her from the many actresses who mistake restlessness for animation, and violence for power.[1]

In 1838 there was at the Adelphi a most significant début, that of Madame Céleste in a speaking part. Hitherto she had been known merely as a danseuse and pantomimist, indeed, the best in London since her début at Drury Lane. She was to melodrama what Vestris had been to burlesque. She brought to it the naturalism of French art as well as the refinement. Her melodramatic début was made in a piece by Bernard called *Saint Mary's Eve*, which in itself was notably above the level of the ordinary melodrama of the day. The *Globe* declared that the manner in which the author handled his subject was almost worthy of Mr. Douglas Jerrold and that "nothing of the kind equalling it in excellence, had been seen since the *Rent Day*." [2] The *Theatrical Examiner* [3] said of it:

> The story of the piece is simple and told with simplicity. It is not loaded with any commonplace or claptrap sentiments, but carried easily and naturally into its place. . . . We recommend young aspirants to the domestic drama school of writing

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[1] *Our Recent Actors*, i, 20.

[2] The *Globe*, Jan. 2, 1838.

[3] Jan. 6, 1838.

> to study the natural and effective resources employed in this piece. Not a pompous word is used in it, yet all the serious portion is impressive — not an indecency is attempted, and yet the comic underplot is the most successful we have seen for some time.
>
> The acting [continues the reviewer] was excellent throughout. Mlle. Céleste, with an occasional superabundance of energy, played very effectively indeed, and with an attention to all those minor details that give life and reality to domestic acting, and are but too little regarded by English actresses; a pleasant sketch of a benevolent sort of little shrew was pleasantly rendered by Miss Shaw, and Mr. Beverley gave the humors of a gallant and somewhat dissolute postman with very good effect. His narrative of the gentleman with the large feet, who was obliged to pull his trousers on over his head, and his sudden recollection of the game at all fours he played in his drunkenness, at which he must have dealt out his missing letters as cards, told extremely well. O'Smith's breakfast was a splendid thing, and Mr. Wilkinson's shabby notions of charity, were exquisitely life-like. We never heard this quaint impersonation of quiet absurdity say anything with a more comical gusto than the remark he makes after announcing his determination to turn poor Madeline out of doors — "and I am happy to say there is every prospect of a wet day."

This success was soon followed by an amazing piece of pantomime in which Céleste impersonated a dumb boy, Maurice. It was adapted by Planché from the French and called the *Child of the Wreck*. Here lay her peculiar talent, that of eloquent pantomime action. Although such art was common on the French stage, it was new to the English. She carried subtlety of movement even into her acting of spoken parts. Her pantomime was most elaborate in Jerrold's somewhat forced composition, the *Mother*, which Céleste gave at the Haymarket in 1838. In the *Morning Chronicle* [1] we read:

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[1] June 1, 1838.

The interest of the piece rests upon her; and she did it ample justice. The tone of her acting was exquisitely appropriate, the characters romantic and affectionate, rather than deeply passionate and tragic. Her pathetic laments in which she regrets that her grief has not even a memory, that numbers of lovely infantile faces rise in her imagination for that one which she never saw, had their shadowy hue of erring fantasy in the wavering accents of her ennunciation. The somnambulism was true in voice and gesture, and beautiful in its truth. The waking of Eulalie by her own voice, as she demands with frantic energy, "Where is the child?" and beholding the trembling old man before her and the gypsy camp around, falls senseless with the shock, was as artistically executed as the scene was dramatically conceived. It drew down repeated and deserved plaudits.

Such she appeared at the beginning of a long career in melodrama. In 1844 she herself became directress of the Adelphi, where she continued to act until 1858. Later she appeared with Boucicault. During all these years her art advanced appreciably. In 1857, for instance, when she revived the *Rent Day* at the Adelphi, the *Theatrical Observer*[1] comments as follows:

> Her Rachel was an example of dramatic ability perhaps unsurpassed upon the stage. Originally a pantomimist, she has by exercise of a high feeling for the beauties of her art brought to perfection a genius which lurked in her composition. Divesting herself of all exaggerated notions of melodramatic action, she presented a picture full of womanly tenderness and patience in undeserved suffering — in fact, we have never seen a more suitable representative of the character.

One other figure of the early melodrama should not escape our notice, that of James Wallack, who was generally admitted to be the most perfect of the early actors in melodrama. His success had been long and varied. He was a child of the theatre. By 1816 he was playing second parts to Edmund Kean. He later became stage manager of Drury Lane under Elliston. The *Theatrical Journal* in 1849, reviewing his career, pronounced him, "the best practical actor in the world." He had "all the requirements of the pantomimist without the display of that acquirement."[1]

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[1] Aug. 6, 1857.

Westland Marston's characterization of his work is interesting because in Wallack London saw the highest development of melodramatic art, in male characters of an heroic type, before the coming of the gentlemanly melodrama of which Charles Kean was the chief exponent. Says Marston:

> There was, perhaps, a touch of theatricality in his manner and some excess in attitudinizing, which, in his day, was easily overlooked in melodrama, but which, in our day, when even tameness is preferred to exaggeration, might have been more hardly dealt with. Perhaps his best part in melodrama, because it gave him the widest scope, was Don Caesar de Bazan. This was a rôle for which his grace of person and carriage, the impulsiveness of his style, both in comic and in serious passages, signally qualified him. He was, in a word, good in all characters that asked for bearing and dash. . . . Spontaneous pathos was hardly one of the actor's gifts, though in certain characters, such as Martin Heywood in the *Rent Day*, he could be very effective. But one was touched chiefly by the manliness and fortitude of the actor, which gave, even to a somewhat forced expression of feeling, a value perhaps chiefly due to contrast. . . . His picture of the ardent love was marked by the refined impulsiveness which was one of his special merits, while his remorse had all the effects by which skill and practice tried to substitute genius. . . . He was an efficient actor in many parts, excellent in a few.

We must pass over such personages as Miss Fanny Kelly, who shared with Mrs. Yates and Céleste the honors of a pioneer in melodramatic realism. What we have said of Buckstone and Webster in comedy must suffice as characterizing their work in melodrama, for both, it should be remembered, were most frequently seen in that form of entertainment.

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[1] Feb. 1, 1849.

We have, I think, gained some conception of the progress from the excessive staginess of melodramatic art observed in the *Tale of Mystery* to a state of moderation and realism. By 1850, however, there was still an overemphasis upon pantomime and posture, a straining for startling contrasts in voice, manner, and situation, and a dash and bravado which sought to carry an audience by sheer force of spirit rather than by the nicer qualities of intellectual reserve and suggestiveness. These defects had from the beginning of the Yates management at the Adelphi been gradually reduced, and much truth to nature and subtlety of interpretation had crept in. This change was brought about partly through such performers as Céleste, Kelly, and Mrs. Yates, and partly through the realistic writings of men like Planché, Bernard, and Douglas Jerrold. Had melodramatic art developed no further, it would still have exerted an important and beneficial influence upon the London stage. It was, as we shall presently see, infused with a new and finer sensibility from the more refined romantic mood of Hugo, and especially Dumas.

Strangely enough the effect of this higher type of French melodrama was tardily felt in England. Before Charles Kean's management of the Princess's Theatre in 1850, it had been decidedly neglected. A version of *Hernani*, to be sure, translated as the *Pledge: or Castilian Honor*, was produced in 1831. It excited no great interest. Even Leigh Hunt, in reviewing the production in the *Tatler*,[1] seems to know nothing more of it than that he "understood it to have been translated or borrowed from the French by Mr. Kenney."

[1] April 8, 1831.

In the summer of 1832, Mlle. Mars played at Covent Garden in works like Scribe's *Valérie* and Dumas's *Henri III*. Her acting was greatly admired by fashionable London. Versions of Hugo's *Le roi s'amuse* and *Marie Tudor* were also given, but they seem to have been produced in much the same fashion as ordinary melodramas. Apparently their translators sought rather to level them to the standards of the English "illegitimate" than to convey to the public their original literary values.

In 1848, as we have had occasion elsewhere to note, the attempt on the part of a French company to present an acting version of Dumas's *Monte Cristo* was suppressed by a disgraceful band of rioters. The public in general seemed to have determined that, although French adaptations might be tolerated in the minor theatres, and in the majors when utilized merely as afterpieces in the traditional melodramatic style, they should not be allowed to encroach upon the field of the literary English drama, or, as it was still called, the "legitimate." Whatever the cause, no marked effect was produced on the London stage by the literary melodrama of France before 1852.

The new influence first made itself conspicuously felt in the acting of Charles Kean. Nothing, perhaps, in our whole period of study, is more significant of the influence at work on the actor's art than the transition of Charles Kean's style from the old manner of his father to that of French literary melodrama. We must therefore examine this curious phenomenon with some care.

The following account of his début in 1827, taken from the *Theatrical Observer*, is of interest, for it makes clear to us most of the qualities and defects for which he was later reputed:

> He is not yet a star of the first magnitude [declared the writer], yet still a star, though we are yet half afraid of the meteoric kind. In person, the young débutant is slight but elegant and his features bear a strong resemblance to those of

his talented father; his voice has a strong similarity, and, indeed, it may be said that all his excellencies are borrowed from the same source. Every point he made was a copy; this, perhaps, is allowable in a son, but we do not hesitate to say that under any other name, Mr. Kean would have failed, or, at least, have excited but little attention. His voice is exceedingly weak, and he has a very unpleasant lisp. Yet, with all these defects, he has some merits unconnected with his great name: for a first appearance, his self-possession and elegance of deportment and action were admirable, and he has all the appearance of a gentleman and read the part correctly, classically, and with elegance. . . . His performance was simply the correct reciting of a well-educated young man.[1]

To the day of his death he was reproached by his critics with these same failings — the inadequate imitation of his father, and the poor voice. His excellencies of grace, self-possession, and gentlemanly bearing, however, were to win his way into the affections, not only of America and the provinces, but later of London as well.

Coleman describes his voice as a "frog in the gutter," and says that his lisp or vocal impediment caused him to say as Shylock,

You take my life
When you do take the *b*eans whereby I live,

"and made him end the play of *Money* with the expression, 'Plenty of *putty*.'"

As late as 1868 a writer in the *Theatrical Journal*[2] finds him still the imitator of his father in stage trickery, entrances and exits, mouthings, immense energy and force, and a disposition to tear a passion to tatters.

With these characteristics in mind, we must follow him in his long career of popular success and histrionic development. Upon his return to London after a prosperous tour of five years in America and the provinces, he reappeared

[1] No. 1814, Oct. 2, 1827.

[2] E. H. Malcolm. Feb. 12, 1868.

with very great success in 1838. The *Theatrical Observer*[1] found him greatly improved and thought he would become as popular as he had been in the provinces. Such was the case, for the receipts at Bunn's theatre at once rose to an unprecedented average, causing Bunn to extend Kean's engagement from forty to sixty nights, and giving Macready, in his management of Covent Garden, the greatest concern. The *Theatrical Observer* described the occasion of the opening night as "a most successful and triumphant entry." Even Forster, Macready's ardent partisan, had to admit in the *Examiner*[2] that the audience "gave him a reception on his entrance such as few actors in their palmiest days of triumph have received. The pit rose to him and a 'sea of handkerchiefs' waved a welcome from the boxes."

Forster believed that "the London stage has received such a rich acquisition in the person of a vigorous, self-possessed, and most graceful actor, whose youth stretches out in a long line of promise, which we shall hope to see thoroughly redeemed." He found him, however, too slow and elaborate, always graceful but never sufficiently "familiar in speech or bearing." This comment is especially interesting in the light of Kean's subsequent development. "His chief power with an audience," thought Forster, "lay in the effect of emotion and of sudden gusts of passion, and his own consciousness of this is betrayed in the habit of emphasizing his level passages too much, of throwing them into startling contrast by long pauses. . . . The emotion was prolonged so far beyond the natural point that it seemed at last the appearance of a trick."

Kean's popularity was ever greater with the audience, however, than with the critics. The *Theatrical Observer*[3] says of his performance of *Macbeth:*

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[1] No. 5010, Jan. 8, 1838.

[2] Jan. 14, 1838.

[3] No. 5805, July 30, 1840.

> At the end of the tragedy Mr. Charles Kean, who stood charged with the murder of the principal character, was acquitted by a merciful jury. What an audience can see in Mr. Kean's assumption of Macbeth to warrant uproarious applause, being awarded at the end of almost every speech of note, we are at a loss to conceive. We wish not to quarrel with the public taste, but cannot help being vexed to see the people so unfriendly toward a young tragedian as to lead him to imagine that he has arrived at the pinnacle of perfection in the histrionic art, while he has yet got a long ladder to mount.

Kean fearlessly invaded Macready's repertory. In 1842, for instance, he played Claude Melnotte in the *Lady of Lyons*, in which Macready had so brilliantly succeeded. "We must confess," said the *Observer*,[1] "that before the curtain rose last evening on the *Lady of Lyons* we were dubious of Mr. Kean's success. All doubt was dispelled long before the conclusion of the first act. The audience was tumultuously delighted throughout the play."

His youth, the writer thought, gave him the chief advantage over his rival. In 1848, the *Theatrical Journal*[2] declared: "Mr. Kean has greatly improved within the last few years; his voice is more distinct, his manner more graceful, and his declamation more polished. He has now acquired some of that repose, the most rare quality in actors, which he so deeply needed."

At the time of his appointment by Queen Victoria in 1848 as conductor of the Windsor Performances, many unkind things were said of Her Majesty's choice. Even the *Theatrical Journal*, which in the main was indulgent toward Kean, hoped "that some one a little above the fourth-rate actor Mr. C. Kean will have the honor of monopolizing the chief characters, for whatever may be the private respectability of that gentleman, he does not in any way represent the talent to be found on the British stage."

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[1] No. 6625, April 14, 1842.

[2] Jan. 27, 1848.

His most notable detractors during his management of the Princess's Theatre were G. H. Lewes and Douglas Jerrold, the former writing for the *Leader*, and the latter for *Lloyd's*. Jerrold was embittered by personal resentment to an extent that made his remarks extravagantly sharp. Lewes, on the other hand, although personally estranged, seems to have preserved an open mind and, as Archer rightly believes, was, although severe, in the main accurate and just.

Lewes admitted Kean's improvement. Reviewing his assumption of *Hamlet*,— his most successful Shakespearean rôle, — Lewes wrote: "He has by arduous labor and constant practice, in a few parts, secured for himself all that stage practice can give a man. . . . Some years ago we thought his Hamlet a very poor performance. It has become great in comparison." Lewes considered Kean's chief weakness a lack of "mastery over emotion. He can portray a fixed condition of the mind but not its fluctuations. He can be passionate, sorrowful, but he cannot let emotions play in his face and tones. There are flashes but no fusion."

Lewes believed, nevertheless, that "on the whole Kean's Hamlet, though not the Hamlet of Shakespeare, as we understand him, is a far more satisfactory performance than Macready's." He is still troubled by his "detonating violence, and the perpetual blank look and open mouth which do duty for all other expressions."[1]

In this summary we may presume to have a fair likeness of the Charles Kean of Shakespearean tragedy. He was essentially a copy of his father, weakened by a poor voice, a disagreeable impediment of speech, an unpleasant and rather inexpressive face, and a perfunctory, unspontaneous nature. He possessed his father's fondness for sudden bursts of violence and uncontrolled emotion, but lacked the same power to make them real. In only one re-

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[1] *Leader*, Oct. 12, 1850, and Feb. 14, 1852.

Charles Kean as Hamlet

From the original painting by Sir Thomas Lawrence, Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library

spect does he seem to have been superior to his original; he possessed a good figure, and could act with a pantomimic grace which was wholly lacking in the work of his father. In spite of the fact that he had toned down his ranting, perfected his technique by constant application, and given an artistic finish to many of his rôles, notably Hamlet, there yet remained in his style most of the objectionable qualities of the old boisterous, romantic type of acting which bore his father's name. There was about his work little of the intellectual subtlety noted in Macready, and he seems to have failed utterly in the opinion of the best critics of the day in the great characters of English tragedy.

During his management of the Princess's he passed through an important stage of development. He gradually came to the realization that his strength as a performer lay outside the beaten track of the "legitimate," namely in comedy and French melodrama. Lewes wrote in 1851, before Kean's appearance in *Pauline* and the *Corsican Brothers*, "In serious comedy and melodrama C. Kean is decidedly gaining the suffrages of those who even refuse him any qualities as an ideal actor. His Ford in the *Merry Wives of Windsor* is the best Ford I have seen." This was the prevailing opinion of the reviewers of the stage.

> We have never [said one] seen this character so ably conceived or executed with such masterly skill. The nervous, irritable manner he displayed in the scene where he induces Falstaff to undertake his mission to Mrs. Ford gave ample evidence of how deeply and correctly Mr. Kean has studied the peculiarities of a jealous husband. It was one of the best pieces of nature we have for some time seen displayed.[1]

The most interesting changes, however, that came over Kean's style were due to his melodramatic impersonations. The first important ones were in *Pauline* and the *Corsican Brothers*, adapted from the French versions seen on the Parisian stage. What the advent of the "gentlemanly melodrama" in these productions meant to the English stage we have already noted under Charles Kean's management.[1] For the first time under dignified and altogether favorable auspices was the finer sort of French melodramatic art to be seen in England. At once Kean's sharpest critics found his acting commendable. Said Lewes:

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[1] Cited by Cole, *Life of Charles Kean*, ii, 25.

> It is certainly worth a passing remark, to note how bad an actor he is in any part requiring the expression of intellect or emotion,—in any part demanding some sympathy with things poetical,— in any part calling for representative power; and how impressive, and I may say unrivalled, he is in gentlemanly melodrama.
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> *The Corsican Brothers* [he wrote] is the most daring and ingenious and exciting melodrama I remember to have seen and is mounted with an elegance and accuracy and ingenuity in the mingling of the supernatural with the real, and an artistic disposition of effects such as, perhaps, no theatre could equal, certainly not surpass.

Most interesting is his approval of Kean's new realism:

> Charles Kean plays the two brothers, and you must see him before you will believe how well and how quietly he plays them, preserving a gentlemanly demeanor and drawing-room manner, very difficult to assume on the stage, if one may judge from its rarity, which intensifies the passion of the part and gives it terrible reality.[2]

Here, indeed, was a change from the boisterous, uncontrollable passion that had disfigured his Shakespearean rôles, to a quiet drawing-room manner. Said Lewes a little later:[3]

> All the time he was detonating through Shakespeare, he was silently training himself for Dumas. We critics are all on

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[1] See p. 256. [2] *Leader*, Feb. 28, 1852. [3] *Ibid.*, March 27, 1852.

the wrong scent! It was not *Othello*, it was not *Macbeth* he was trying to play; it was the *Corsican Brothers*, it was *Pauline*. There lay his taste, there lay his talent.

The change that now came over Kean's acting was noticed by all. Said a writer in the *Theatrical Journal:*[1]

> Every step he takes on the stage — every point in his dialogue — every action he makes use of, is carefully calculated as to the effect. His principal power is decidedly in melodrama, which gives him full scope for the sudden and almost electric bursts of passion for which he is so famous.

It would seem that his style now consisted of a level reserve power out of which came bursts of intense and fiery passion. Such is the impression conveyed by Squire Bancroft, who saw him later on the circuit: "In spite of his failing health, there were many moments of impetuous passion and wondrously effective rapid change of manner in his acting, always to be remembered."

The changes that he made in his melodramatic style he introduced also into his readings of Shakespeare. Lewes, referring to his performance of Richard in 1854, said:[2]

> On Monday night I was astonished at the improvement seventeen years of hard practice had effected with such hopeless material. He played quietly at first and for him transcendently. I really thought it was going to be his best Shakespearean part. He had renounced the stampings, pauses, and spluttering bursts of the juvenile Richard.

Only in Kean's reading of the fourth act did Lewes object to his violence.

Similarly in the same year the *Theatrical Journal*[3] declared:

> Charles Kean is not at all the same man that he was when he acted at Drury Lane a few years ago. He then strove after galvanic effects and strained his physique to produce them. Years of study and application induced him to abandon a

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[1] March 23, 1853. [2] *Leader*, Feb. 25, 1854. [3] Oct. 3, 1854.

style which his good sense convinced him was a mistake and a quiet subdued power is the result.

In Kean, then, and not in Fechter, was seen the first marked change from the excesses of the old school to that of the newer melodramatic style. By means of it Kean had succeeded in silencing many of his most determined critics. In this regard the following statement in the *Theatrical Journal* of February 3, 1858, is of interest:

> Four years ago and upwards [it is] since we . . . said (besides his being the best manager) Mr. Charles Kean was the best representative of Hamlet upon the stage, and now we confess that we feel reassured and gratified upon this point, when the *Times*, *Globe*, *Illustrated London News*, *Dispatch*, and almost every daily and weekly newspaper have endorsed our view with the most self-satisfactory and free criticism that could be written upon the management and performance of any actor.

Surely Kean had won the approval of the public. Every honor was bestowed upon him. When he and his wife appeared at Drury Lane in 1861, the "whole pit rose," an unusual tribute at this time, for, as the *Theatrical Journal* remarked: "When Mr. and Mrs. Kean crossed the stage, the pit rose as it had risen many years before and as it will rise again, we hope."

To this should be added the tribute paid to his work by Gladstone at the banquet tended him by his Eton schoolfellows. According to that statesman, he had "made the theatre into a gigantic instrument of education for the instruction of the young and edification as well as instruction of those of maturer years." [1]

Not the least of his services to his art was the gradual introduction, in spite of virulent criticism and even invective, of a style of acting which, while only a compromise with the old, was yet the most life-like that playgoers had seen in the acted tragedy during the century. Kean was a prophet of the faith whose messiah was Fechter.

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[1] Quoted in *The Bancrofts*, p. 41.

Kean was not alone, although the most conspicuous, in the adoption of the new stage manner. Perhaps next to him Dillon was the best known. Baker styles him the English Frédérick Lemaître.[1] He gave the effect of reality, however, as Marston thinks, by impulse rather than by "psychological discernment."

Of a more conscious naturalism was the work of Alfred Wigan. "Extreme refinement," said Marston, "delicate perception, and truth to nature, combined with deep, though quiet feeling, were the chief characteristics of Mr. Alfred Wigan." [2] He specialized frankly in plays from the French, playing such rôles as Monsieur Jacques, Dufard in *The First Night*, and Mauléon in *The Roused Lion*. One of his most famous parts was that of John Mildmay in Tom Taylor's *Still Waters Run Deep*. Marston states that "the powerful effect which he produced with the utmost simplicity of means was a theme of general comment and admiration." It is interesting to note incidentally that Dillon had been brought out under Mathews and Vestris's management of Covent Garden in Knowles's *Love*, and that he later played Mark Meddle in *London Assurance*.

Thus we see that long before the appearance of Fechter the stage had already become familiar with the general type of art for which that actor has usually been regarded as the sponsor. There had been a slow development in this manner observable in all the branches of stagecraft. In acting, perhaps, more than in any other intellectual pursuit, the barriers of classification are indistinct and yielding, and we cannot be sure whether the drift toward naturalism was more the result of comic or of melodramatic styles. Certain it is that tragedy had become infected with it. Macready himself was often considered a melodramatic actor, and as we have just remarked, Charles Kean frankly became one. Among the most astonishing facts of Fechter's début was his assertion in the presence of Dickens, Forster, and Marston, "Macready is my banner." [1] "There was truth in the statement," said Marston, "for he had the familiar colloquial side of Macready; but this with sentiment and refinement formed his only stock in trade. He wanted Macready's exaltation in passion."

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[1] An eminent Parisian actor of the period of Fechter. See Baker, p. 293.

[2] *Our Recent Actors*, ii, 252.

One fact, however, is, I believe, now clear: that Fechter's innovation lay not so much in the novelty of style of acting which he illustrated on the stage, for that had much in common with the melodramatic acting already familiar in London for many years, and, under Charles Kean, familiar even in tragedy. His real distinction lay in the fact that he for the first time dared to apply these new methods with all their logical consequences to the one play which, more than all others, had drawn to itself an incrustation of tradition. *Hamlet* was the last play which the defenders of national honor and British drama wished to see degraded by the vulgar arts of melodrama. For this reason, Macready and Charles Kean had introduced their changes with hesitation and with due regard for the traditional effects of "points," which every audience expected to see properly executed, and according to the effect of which very largely they approved or condemned an actor's performance. What this attitude on the part of the earlier audience really was is testified by Forster in reviewing Macready's reading of Hamlet.

> Suppose [said he] we had an actor who could subdue all sense of his art, could consent to sacrifice all dramatic point, all severe effect, all brilliant antithesis of action, — who with grace, wit, chivalrous and princely bearing, profound intel-

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[1] Marston, *Our Recent Actors*, ii, 198.

lect, and a high faculty of imagination, could yet merge all of these in a struggle of sensibility, of weakness, and of melancholy, and bear them with him about the stage like, "sweet bells jangled, out of tune, and harsh," . . . we are more than *half inclined to think that his audience might fancy he had little business where he was*, *and take to hissing the pointless* and unprecise performance.[1]

This passage makes impressively clear the true significance of the Fechter triumph — the silencing of conventional criticism. The terror inspired in the heart of the actor by the grievous certainty of "damning," more, perhaps, than anything else in the early century, had held the progress of tragic acting in check. This same feeling had led more than one critic to predict failure for Fechter's Hamlet. It had been widely announced that he was to give the old play a wholly new interpretation in a modern spirit. It was a challenge to the upholders of the "legitimate" style; it was equally a summons to the believers in the new methods from France, which, since 1852, had been familiar on the London stage. Had Fechter appeared in 1835 with his radical reform, it would, we may be sure, have met with just such a fate as Forster had predicted. By 1860, however, the innovation had every prospect of success. London audiences under Kean and others had for more than a decade been hardened to "vulgar" changes. A faith in the entertainment value of the new naturalistic French art was already widespread among the theatregoing public. The spirit of the 1848 riots had completely died out. The populace was not only prepared to greet favorably the daring foreign invasion, but many, it is certain, were even eager for it. There were still conservatives, and among them were most of the "intellectuals." Their dislike for the shallowness of the newer arts of melodrama, more than their fondness of the old inflated style, caused them to cling to their old ideals. Fechter's overwhelming triumph disarmed them. "No innovation," said Dickens, "was ever accepted with so much favor by so many intellectual persons precommitted to and preoccupied by another system as Fechter's Hamlet."

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[1] *Examiner*, Oct. 11, 1835. The italics are mine.

This revulsion of the popular taste, prepared for by long years of slow half-conscious education was, I believe, the most significant fact of our study.

There was yet another consideration still stronger in his favor. He had chosen the one play in all Shakespeare which lent itself best to a naturalistic treatment. Not the least remarkable of the qualities of the play is the fact that, whatever manner of interpretation is given to it, the leading character seems still to make its ever fresh and universal appeal, provided that the mode of interpretation is in keeping with the spirit of the age in which it is assumed.[1] This was perhaps the tragedy in which Shakespeare gave his realistic bent the freest play. At any rate, the apparent fitness between Fechter's new and simple readings and the text itself was felt at once by a public already prepared for the change. Its success was all but inevitable.

It is significant, however, that Fechter attempted only one other Shakespearian rôle, Othello, and that of this he made a comparative failure.

We must not assume, however, that Fechter's methods were wholly natural. His great distinction was that he had cleared the Shakespearean stage of the artificiality that tradition had piled upon it. The naturalness that Fechter substituted for the previous artificiality was neither perfect art nor perfect nature. It was merely the naturalism of melodrama in a high state of development, known familiarly in London as the "gentlemanly melodrama."

How Fechter's innovation appeared to B. W. Watkins, an old playgoer who had contributed for many decades to the *Theatrical Journal*, is seen in the following notes:

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[1] The recent Hamlet in plus-fours is an interesting repetition of the old experiment.

1. Fechter did not aim at making points.

2. He entered and left the stage only by the doors and the colonnades at the back.

3. His readings were absolutely new; in some respects great; in some below mediocrity.

4. He failed almost entirely in elocution.

5. His wig and costume were entirely different from what the English audience expected. His hair was long and yellow.

6. His reading of the first soliloquy was defective in elocution, but he greatly intensified the scene of interrogation with Marcellus and Horatio.

7. His face was facile and very expressive.

8. "Rest, rest, perturbed spirit," unsatisfactory.

9. The scene with Polonius truly great. Here he was in sympathy with the poet's meaning when in "Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool," he did away with the former practice of declamatory effect, and spoke it "from the inmost recesses of his heart, which is bleeding with pity for the sad fate which his rashness had brought upon the old man."

10. His colloquy with the players, and "To be or not to be," and the closet scene were admirable. "When this cleverly acted scene closed and his mother in going advances towards him with outstretched hands, how effectively studied is the position of Mr. Fechter, where he holds the portrait of his father before her, rapidly glances at the portal through which the spirit . . . has just issued, and then at the body of the unburied Polonius."

11. This especially: [with two or three exceptions] "all that Mr. Fechter does is natural. There is nothing stagy about him, and there is acuteness of perception in many parts of his reading which is novel and praiseworthy. He sits upon the tombstone and fondles the skull of Yorick with the observation of a genuine student of nature, whilst he addresses Horatio with all the warmth of human affections."

Watkins concluded:

> A thorough Hamlet should be an intellectual one, a thinking one, and an elocutionary one as well as a deportmental

one. As it is, Mr. Fechter's is a success, more on account of its exceeding novelty than with regard to its ideal qualities; nevertheless, at its proper estimation, it is one of the most marvellous instances of histrionic industry that it is possible to conceive.

This review appears to be a fair representation of Fechter's excellences and weaknesses as they are reflected in the great body of contemporary criticism which his performances drew forth. An account of his acting in *Othello* given us by Henry Morley [1] confirms most of Watkins's conclusions and especially the leading thought that, while Fechter had given much vividness and truth by a realistic diction, he had not infrequently spoiled the effect which the passages he changed were intended to produce. For instance, Morley cites the reading of Othello's answer to the charge of guilt, especially at the lines,

> The very head and front of my offending
> Hath this extent, no more.

> He utters the "no more" [wrote Morley] as one violently repelling a foul imputation on his honor, with fierce gesture of advance towards the table. Upon this senators rise as if they expected an attack, and Othello gives the next eight or nine lines, "rude am I in my speech," etc., as a special apology called for by that show of violence — an apology given with Mr. Fechter's French accent in a tone that might seem to a critic out of tune with the actor, oddly suggestive of a French politeness by no means in accord with the speaker's own estimate of his character. But we have no right to speak of it so lightly. The device is new and ingenious, it gives a lively break to the speech, and carries it to the end in true colloquial fashion. Shakespeare, however, meant dignity of expression here.

Fechter, then, while possessed of a genuine feeling for nature, was more unmistakably striving for melodramatic effect, not only in acting but, as the chapter on methods and principles of production has shown, in all the aspects of his staging. Such, for instance, was the carefully studied conclusion to the closet scene just cited, and also the use of the mirror in the murder scene of *Othello* to give point to the line,

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[1] *Journal of a London Playgoer*, p. 274.

> It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul.

When the freshness of his naturalism wore off, the artificiality of his effects was the more glaring. His revival of *Hamlet* in 1864, strangely enough, was not at all a success. His popularity, even in the French melodramatic romances, like *Ruy Blas* and the *Corsican Brothers*, was also soon on the wane. How sentiment had changed regarding his innovations appears in the following remark made in the *Theatrical Journal*:[1] "Within a month, a little month — the frail public desert him and both *Hamlet* and the season's last nights are announced. Two seasons ago it drew the town, when the actor was less known, and we confess to have been infatuated with it."

There was clearly something perishable about the Fechter acting. The important contribution it made to the dramatic progress of the times was that it proved to the satisfaction of most thoughtful critics as well as of the English public at large that the realism of melodrama, which previously had been regarded as vulgar, degenerate, and un-English, was actually an improvement in the rendering of literary drama over the stilted artificiality of the old English manner of tragic declamation.

In this proof lay the efficacy of Fechter's reform. It was not so much the beginning of a new movement as it was the consummation of a long period of hesitant tendencies in the search for realism. Fechter's success gave confidence and clarity to all who had visions of a better type of acting than that of the English tragic tradition. He proved that the very thing most of them dreaded — "vulgar" realism — was the mode of interpretation that English literary drama most needed.

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[1] *Theat. Jour.*, June 22, 1869.

Progress during the eighteen-sixties was rapid. Fechter's own heresy had done more than anything else to loose the bonds of conservatism. His work was seconded by the still more radical, but less reverent, manner of Boucicault. The rage for sensation, which the extreme work of both these artists created from 1860 to 1870, dulled the sensibilities of the English public to the claims of tradition. A state of theatrical freedom had been effected, and in this achievement no workman was more a fearless pioneer or genuine artist than was Fechter. It was to be expected that his style, which was essentially artificial, and real only by comparison with what had preceded it in tragedy, should soon be replaced by a more genuine romantic art in such performers as Mr. Irving and Miss Terry. To Fechter's lasting glory, however, is to be credited the achievement of preparing the way for the Irving management of the Lyceum.

In melodrama and comedy we have traced a gradual growth away from extravagance and staginess to a high degree of realistic fidelity. The influence of Pixérécourt and Ducange had gradually given place to that of Dumas and Hugo. With the French influence had gradually mixed the English domesticity of Jerrold, which enabled the English actors to develop a style of national as well as realistic familiarity. For many years the acting of melodrama was vulgar and inartistic, and therefore unworthy of "legitimate drama." But in the work of Charles Kean and Fechter, we have seen it raised to the dignity of tragic acting under conditions of legitimacy. With this final step was realized at last the real freedom of the stage. The scales of tradition had at length fallen from the eyes of the public and critics alike. The way to a new era had been prepared. There was yet one other manifestation of the new spirit, which has rightly been regarded the greatest of all — the work of Robertson and the Bancrofts. We are now ready to bring to their so-called revolution a just understanding of its relationship to the earlier schools of acting.

Chapter XVII

THE ROBERTSONIAN COMEDY
BEGINNINGS

BEFORE considering the innovations for which the little Prince of Wales's Theatre has long been a symbol, let us glance briefly over the lines of progress we have thus far traced.

In the realm of "legitimate" comedy a general condition of exaggeration and artificiality in acting, staging, and costuming had gradually given way to a prevailing quietness and realism of presentation. This moderation and appearance of nature was still only comparative; it was far from what we should to-day consider either restrained or realistic. Contemporary dress and the manners of contemporary society had gradually won a place on the stage. This tendency we have seen strengthened, if not actually created, by the type of burlesque acting popularized at the Olympic and Lyceum under Vestris and Charles Mathews, Jr., and continued by the Swanboroughs at the Strand. By 1860 the tone of comedy was much more moderate and realistic than it could possibly have been twenty years previously. The conscious efforts of such artists as Vestris and Mathews, who were strictly under the influence of French methods, was seconded by the change in theatrical conditions following the overthrow of the theatrical monopoly. During the period of readjustment following this event, the small minor stages triumphed definitely over the larger monopoly houses, thus making possible in legitimate drama an easier and more intimate manner on the stage. Perhaps strongest of all the forces that overthrew the old methods and introduced the new was that which had come in with the French type of melodrama in 1802. This type gradually rose to a position of favoritism with the better British public. At first degraded and despised, because of its identification with the illegitimate houses, and because of its relegation to the end of the program at the majors, it gradually rose to a level of artistry through the careful staging and acting of such people as the Yateses, Céleste, Wallack, Webster, and Buckstone. Into their work had come a spirit of reserve and realism. Finally, those tendencies had triumphed in the fresh influence of the literary romanticists of France. This last stage began with the acting of Charles Kean in his management of the Princess's, and rose to its crowning success in Fechter's revolution.

It is true that the defenders of the old school rallied for a while and almost fanatically supported their hero Phelps on the boards of Drury Lane; but the tide of novelty was rising fast, and by 1869 it had swept Phelps, with his Shakespeare and Byron performances, even from that harborage. Boucicault and the free-art movement had triumphed.

Against this background stood out, as the most significant fruition, the work of Robertson and the Bancrofts. Their movement did not find its first expression at the Prince of Wales's Theatre. Since, as I believe, the Robertsonian movement attaches itself to the lines of development in acting which we have traced, we shall now proceed to consider these relations. We shall first examine the two principal ones — eccentric, or character, acting and the H. J. Byron style of burlesque.

"Character parts," said Robertson, writing as the "Lounger" of the *Illustrated Times*, several years before his important work as a dramatist began, "are those that do not positively belong to any of the usually recognized lines of business. . . . They are too exceptional to require any detailed description." By this, Robertson clearly meant characters which defied classification under any of the old types of comedy and melodrama, characters — in other words — which were *individual*. These were characters that could not be conveniently labeled "low comedy," "light comedy," "hero," "heroine," "villain," "chamber-maid," "soubrette," "old peasant," "old father," and so forth. Upon this rare and now neglected variation, as in all evolution, the Robertsonian developments were to proceed. What had rarely been seen on the Vestris, Mathews, Wigan, Webster, and Buckstone stages was to become Robertson's chief artistic contribution. What with them had been called "eccentric," with him became universal. They had based their work on clear conception of types. He based his upon absence of type.

"Character acting," says Archer, "which may be defined as mimetic realism, the minute and unconventional reproduction of observed idiosyncracies, is to be regarded as the distinguishing feature of this period."[1]

These exceptional stage figures were the natural outcome of the general progress toward realism in acting such as we have already reviewed. Such characters, for instance, as Professor Truffles and Miss Tucker in *Time Works Wonders*, by Douglas Jerrold, were recognized by the audiences and critics of the day as miniatures from life. This tendency to depart from types was English and would, I believe, have shown itself much more rapidly but for the French influence, which was so strong from 1830 to 1860. After that last year, however, such characters assumed a high importance on the London stage. In comedy the most notable case was that of Sothern's Lord Dundreary in Tom Taylor's *Our American Cousin*. The part as first written by Taylor was of a more or less conventional low-comedy type. So it seemed at first to Sothern, and he narrowly escaped failure upon his first performance of it. By chance he fell into a telling "eccentric" vein of interpretation, to give the character individuality and interest. In America it enjoyed the phenomenal success of eight hundred performances, and in 1861 it began an equally distinguished career on the London stage.

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[1] Ward, *Reign of Victoria*, ii, 591.

Evolution in the character, however, still continued, for we read in the *Theatrical Observer* for November 12, 1862:

> A very great improvement has taken place in the character of the principal personage, that of Lord Dundreary. . . . He has been made a more natural kind of individual; his exaggerated form has been modified, and even although now one laughs less at the absurdity of the creation than at the comicalness of the character, still there is more probability in his ignorance than at first.

Marston has given us a critical picture of Sothern's style, and has hinted at its relationship to that of the most advanced comedian before his time, Charles Mathews:

> In broad eccentric characters Mr. Sothern's humor was peculiar to himself. In refined comedy, albeit less airy than that of the younger Mathews, it was not dissimilar. Moreover, in his power in the direction of sentiment, though special and very limited, he differed from his brother comedian in whom it scarcely existed. . . . In his peculiarity as an eccentric humorist he had no rival in his own day — no successful competitor. Whether by design or instinct, he was master of all that is most irresistible in the unexpected. If, as in Lord Dundreary, the character that he assumed was half idiotic, he would deliver its absurdities with an air of profound sagacity, and now and then relieve them by a sharp thrust of shrewd common sense.

The chief source of his humor was the "juxtaposition of what was comical in spirit and serious in manner." We are also told that he "loved a touch of reality, however superficial, from the bottom of his heart." So great was his passion in this direction, says Marston, that in one of

Marston's plays he wanted to introduce into a pathetic, almost tragic, scene a *chaise à deux*, then a novelty, in order that the two actors, sitting almost back-to-back, might better conceal from each other their real feelings.[1]

Dundreary was the most popular and most strongly marked of the character parts before those created in the plays of Robertson. Naturally this effort was widely imitated. Outside of Miss Wilton's company, no one seems to have approached Sothern's success. The Wilton mood appears to have been a slight modification of his exaggerated comedy style toward more life-like reading of the eccentric parts. Sothern in Dundreary had done for character acting very much what Fechter had done for French melodramatic realism: he had raised it to a triumphant success, not so much by sincere realism, as by fresh extravagance. As Fechter's shallowness was soon found out, so also was Sothern's. The following article, written in 1870 by an old critic [2] on the staff of the *Theatrical Journal*, is illuminating, especially with regard to the rapidly changing standards of the previous decade:

> When this type of non-entity first appeared on the English stage, we paid him a visit and laughed heartily at his vapid eccentricities — the character was a novelty, of course, totally unlike anything in real life, but it was a clever creation of Sothern's and his impersonation of the abominable aristocrat was admitted upon all hands to be inimitable.

The writer went again in 1870 to see the performance with "an unbiased mind." These were his impressions:

> It was with difficulty . . . that our facial muscles relaxed. . . . People laughed, it is true, at the silly jokes, the stammering, the affected hop and chuckle of the demented nobleman, but these were the people who laugh also at the clown and pantaloon; sounds of hilarity proceeded from the gallery and upper boxes . . . but the expression of the more intellectual

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[1] *Our Recent Actors*, ii, 199 ff.

[2] "Gamma"; *Theat. Jour.*, March 30, 1870.

section of the audience was that of contempt, not unmixed with disgust.

The writer also recalls that

> George Augustus Sala was one of the very few critics who, at the time of Dundreary's popularity, ventured to dissent from the general tone of approval. He mercilessly cut up the favorite of the town, looking on Dundreary as a senseless buffoon and an unmitigated lie. We begin to think that he was right. The character is an unreal mockery, and the piece itself about as contemptible as any average modern stuff. Tom Taylor himself must now be ashamed of it.

In Sothern, perhaps more than in anyone else of the day, Robertson saw the type of acting most in accord with his own ideals. As early as the fifties, as we are told in his *Life and Writings*, Robertson was carefully cultivating a realistic method in his own acting. While he was in Ireland, Warden, one of his companions, said of him, "He is one of the best character actors of the day." He said also that Robertson's Lascelles in *All that Glitters is not Gold* was played, "in a cool and natural manner . . . so unorthodox as to be almost startling." Robertson, however, soon found that his chance of success was not on the stage. Either he was too advanced in his method to appeal to the contemporary audiences, or, what appears more likely, he did not possess the trick of popularity. That he had histrionic ability of an extraordinary sort, however, is clearly shown by the testimony that we have already cited from John Hare and Clement Scott to the wonderful power he possessed of conveying the idea of his characterizations in reading the parts of a play to the Prince of Wales's company.

Since he could not himself carry out his conceptions of acting, he was on the outlook for some one who could. In Sothern he first came upon the ideal of his fancy. The story of their relationship is one of the pleasantest and most significant anecdotes of the time. Sothern created

Robertson's David Garrick, the author's first London success, and, for Sothern, Robertson wrote *Society*. It was a source of much regret to Sothern that he could not produce the play over Buckstone's veto. He did the next best thing, and advanced Robertson thirty pounds, which Robertson later scrupulously returned. Although Robertson's *Society* was not produced at the Haymarket with Sothern as a popular allurement, the relationship between Robertson and the style of acting which Sothern represented is thus made unmistakable.

There was another still more important link connecting the Robertson movement to the past — that of burlesque. We are already familiar with the type of burlesque acting for which Vestris and Mathews were famous, and with the development of the newer forms of burlesque that had come in through the French channels of influence.

When the burlesque methods of these artists had become familiar in legitimate comedy representation, burlesque naturally took upon itself a new character. This it did in the work of the Swanboroughs and H. J. Byron at the Strand Theatre. It here became vulgarized, departing from the literary delicacies of Planché, to assume the slang, the manners, and the coarse humor of the London streets.

This interesting transition is admirably summed up for us in Robertson's own account of the evolution of an early burlesque or low-comedy type of chamber maid: [1]

> In those days of the performance of the old comedies, works whose absence from the stage we should regret more did we not remember their utter conventionality and unnaturalness — there used to be found in most dramatic companies a short, somewhat stout, white-toothed, sweet-breathed, stub-nosed, black-eyed, broad-hipped Phoebe who played the class of

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[1] "Lounger," in the *Theatrical Times*, quoted in *Life and Works of T. W. Robertson*, p. 117.

> character called in green-room parlance the chambermaid. She possessed a good voice, could sing by ear, and had a saucy way of tossing her head that was half boyish, half hoydenish, and wholly captivating. [She] advised her young mistress to elope, . . . abused her old master, counselled his wife, took guineas and kisses from the "Captain," and loved Tagg his valet. [She possessed] natural wit and small education.
>
> "*Mais nous avons changé tout cela!*"
>
> About the time that the art of acting, as an art, began to be degraded, the chambermaid gradually assumed French airs and vaudeville graces. It was, as Mr. Square, the philosopher, said, "in the eternal fitness of things" that, as our stage became a school-boy vulgarization of the Parisian theatres, pert Betty should be transformed into piquant "Lottee" and that the good old English oaken-staircase, candlestick-bearing, cherry-brandy sort of word, chambermaid, should be abandoned for *soubrette.*
>
> The *soubrette* is highly genteel, oh, so genteel that she has velvet ribbons at the pockets of sky-blue satin aprons and travels over Europe in Mechlin lace cap, the size of a crown piece. She sings too, scientifically . . . a queer combination of reality and impossibility — of theatre and opera, neither flesh, fowl, nor good red herring.

Robertson then significantly remarks:

> The *soubrette* is very nearly off the stage . . . eclipsed by a more vivid, more dazzling, more spangly star, — the burlesque actress, who now rules the hours between nine and twelve P.M. as sure as legs are legs. [She is] handsome . . . expressive . . . [can] sing Donizetti as well as Mackney's 'Oh, Rosa, how I lub you, Coodles cum.' [She can] whistle [and is] faultless on the bones. [She] dances all steps and must play farce, tragedy, opera, comedy, melodrama, pantomime, and ballet. . . . She is the rage of London.

Unconsciously, perhaps, Robertson was here describing the versatility of the very woman who was later to make possible the popular expression of his own genius. Miss Marie Wilton was at this very time the chief burlesque actress of London.

Before, however, we approach her labors as actress, we must record that the versatility required of a burlesque actor and marvelled at by Robertson was apparent in others. The greatest male performer in burlesque at this time was essentially a tragedian — the far-famed Robson. He had appeared with Farren in 1853 and had, until his death in 1864, enjoyed a reputation altogether unique in the annals of the English stage. Oxenford of the *Times*, commenting on his burlesque of the *Merchant of Venice* in 1853, declared him the greatest actor that had been seen on the English stage since Edmund Kean. Thackeray, it is said, considered him the greatest genius on the stage.[1] Bancroft declared, "The power of Robson on the stage was contagious, like a fever, and take him all-in-all, I think he was the most remarkable actor of those days and perhaps one of the most remarkable of any days." [2] So remarkable was his talent and so individual was his method that we need not delay for a careful study of his manner. As for his style, the following characterization must suffice:

"His merit — and it amounted to genius — lay in his rare power of combining tragic passion and real hints of the terrible with ludicrous burlesque."

His importance to our study lies in the proof that he affords of the variousness of the burlesque art of this period. No longer were pieces taken from the repertories of the French theatres. Byron had turned to a new source, the repertory of old English plays. Shakespeare and Bulwer were now made over into burlesques for the Strand. Such was the irreverence of the times.

The *soubrette* type created by Madame Vestris had passed from the stage and a very different and more vital energy had made its way into burlesque. The new was more daring, more vulgar, more blatant, but it was far more in accord with the life and thought of audiences than Vestris's parlor manners, silk shoes, and petticoats had been.

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[1] See Clement Scott, *Thirty Years at the Play;* also *Theat. Jour.*, Dec. 8, 1869.

[2] *The Bancrofts*, p. 30.

Miss Swanborough, who with the other members of her family had opened the Strand Theatre shortly after the break-up of the Vestris-Mathews management at the Lyceum, sought, we may presume, to continue the work of these celebrated artists. She soon took the theatre entirely into her own hands, and appears to have been a most successful lessee. In 1859 the *Theatrical Journal* remarks: "The Strand, which has been rescued by Miss Swanborough from the state of degradation into which it had fallen, is now one of the best conducted and favorite theatres in the metropolis."[1] In 1858 she engaged Miss Marie Wilton, who had already become a favorite under Dillon's management at the Lyceum, where she made her début in 1856. Her popularity increased rapidly and she was soon drawing all London to witness her remarkably lifelike creations of character. There was evidently a strong disposition on the part of the company to advance the standards of realistic effect that had been left by Vestris and Mathews. In 1862 an article in the *Theatrical Observer* praises Mr. Swanborough for being "placid in his demeanor" and for other realistic qualities. It says of Miss Wilton: "Her *naturel* is the true Dejazet style — her bantering is to life, her persiflage carries with it the most acute *vis comica*, and her each makeup is honored with overwhelming applause."[2]

Miss Wilton, it should be repeated, was a product of the rapidly changing dramatic conditions. She had made her début at Manchester at the age of five, in a small part, under Macready. She had ranged over the whole field of drama, from the mother of Claude Melnotte, in *The Lady of Lyons*, to that of Perdita in Bough's travesty of *A Winter's Tale*. By the time she undertook the management of the Prince of Wales's in 1865, she was reputed as an all-round actress. She had been chosen to play the rôle of Juliet at the Shakespeare centenary celebration. The *Theatrical Observer*,[1] in announcing her last benefit at the Strand, wrote of her work as follows: "She intimates that her retirement will take place from these boards which she has so long adorned. In a certain range of parts, extending much higher than the region of burlesque Miss Wilton has earned the right to be considered one of the most accomplished actresses of the day."

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[1] Sept. 14.

[2] *Theat. Obs.*, July 5, 1862.

Dickens's telling appreciation of her art in burlesque is familiar. Upon seeing her at the time of her début in 1858 at the Strand, when she created the part of Pippo in a burlesque called *The Maid and the Magpie*, the novelist wrote to a friend:

> There is the strangest thing in it that ever I have seen on the stage. The boy Pippo by Miss Wilton. While it is astonishingly impudent (must be, or it would n't be at all), it is so stupendously like a boy and unlike a woman, that it is perfectly free from offence. . . . I call her the cleverest girl that I have ever seen on the stage in my time and the most singularly original.[2]

This versatility and this realism Miss Wilton had developed entirely apart from Robertson. If it was not the prevailing tendency of the day among the younger aspirants for stage honors to affect these qualities, it was rapidly becoming so. Noticeable, too, is the fact that all the company she gathered about her had similar ideals. Previously, however, they had all played separately — some as far away as Liverpool.

It is interesting, for instance, to trace the development of Mr. Bancroft's art. He himself tells us that his first master was Boucicault. He also tells how he took special pains to imitate Sothern in Dundreary, and how he had acted for a month with Charles Mathews. Of this engagement he says: "I acted a month in a round of plays — an experience added to unvarying help and kindness, which could not fail to have an influence for good on the efforts of an ambitious young actor."

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[1] Dec. 19, 1864.

[2] Letter quoted by Filon, *The English Stage*, p. 102.

This revelation by Mr. Bancroft helps us materially to bridge the gulf which was supposed to exist between the work of the Bancrofts and that of all other workers in comedy. Mathews, the great realist of the English stage from 1835 until the time of the Bancrofts, here appears distinctly in the rôle of teacher to one of the chief exponents of Robertsonian drama. In this connection let us recall that in 1854 Robertson himself had been prompter for Charles Mathews at the Lyceum.[1]

Bancroft had furthermore acted in Shakespearean parts under Charles Kean, and had been offered by Fechter a position in his company, which he refused in order to accept Miss Wilton's offer, the comparative uncertainty of which was more than offset by love at first sight. In all, he tells us he had played 346 parts in four years and four months! It seems more than likely that his style had been largely determined before he joined the Prince of Wales's troupe. Granted the same intelligence and the same experience, any young actor of the day would probably have cultivated much the same stage manner. Filon, who knew him on the stage, says that "The rendering of cool, well-bred nonchalance came naturally to him, but in the depth of his eye there lurked a gleam of irrepressible humor."[2]

This was distinctly the Sothern mannerism, and it had no doubt became a fashion which, at the time, was difficult to escape.

There seems, then, to be no lack of evidence that the chief workers in the Robertsonian enterprise were distinctly the product of their times. Their art had roots deep in the past. Such facts preclude the shadowy, yet confident, statements that are often made to the effect that the art of the Robertson school was a spontaneous creation within the walls of the Prince of Wales's Theatre.

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[1] Robertson's biographer states that he was paid three pounds a week for his services at the Olympic; but this, I believe, must be a mistake, for at this time, 1854, Mathews and Vestris were lessees of the Lyceum.

[2] *The English Stage*, p. 105.

Before we go further, let us face squarely the traditional views regarding the Robertson-Bancroft innovations. In Mr. Pemberton's edition of Robertson's *Society* and *Caste*,[1] prepared especially for the use of students of the drama, that editor informs us that

> in the late fifties and early sixties the condition of affairs at the London theatres was indeed deplorable. Good actors we no doubt had. Steeped in stage tradition, with a love for what they called the "legitimate" side of their art, they could give a good if somewhat stilted account of Shakespeare; and it must be admitted that they could play the comedies of Sheridan, Goldsmith, Holcroft, O'Keefe, Bickerstaff, and the rest of the 18th-century dramatists, with a breeziness and breadth of style lacking in present-day comedians. Moreover, they wore the costumes of by-gone periods as if to the manner born, and carried themselves so bravely that audiences overlooked the poverty-stricken slovenly way in which the pieces were placed upon the stage.

He states further: "Except in melodrama, where some attention had to be paid to spectacular effect, the scenery and appointments were disgracefully meagre." Mr. Pemberton does not tell us his source for this remark, but it probably emanates, like those made by Filon, from Clement Scott, who, at least, is the only authority on these points whom Mr. Pemberton quotes. Scott's assertions were even stronger:

> I can scarcely describe the slovenliness with which plays were performed, or the ludicrous managerial methods adopted to illustrate modern comedy. Such a thing as nature was

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[1] In the "Belles Lettres" series.

scarcely known on the stage. Old men of sixty played lovers of twenty-one, and the costumes of ladies of fashion came out of the theatrical rag-bag.

He even insists that "anything more slovenly than the stage adornments of those days was surely never seen." [1]

Without denying a basis of truth for such characterizations, we must, nevertheless, test them in the light of what else we know of the five years preceding the Wilton management of the Prince of Wales's. Scott was a devoted follower of Robertson, and in his zeal to give his hero a place in dramatic history, may possibly have overstated the wretchedness Robertson and the Bancrofts reformed. His statements, however, may be considered the texts upon which most of the comment concerning the innovation at the Prince of Wales's has been based. At least, they raise an important question in stage history. If they are literally true, or even in the impression they create, they indicate a strange and sudden break between the slow painstaking development we have traced in the preceding chapters and the beginning of the "cup and saucer" comedy of Robertson. Knight adds his impression to the same effect: although he claims no great revolutionary fame for the Robertson movement, and says "its merits literary and dramatic, are not remarkable, and the work cannot be regarded as epoch-making," he fully shares Scott's opinion concerning the darkness out of which Robertson and his work emerged. "Half a century ago," he declares, "the spectacle might have been seen of a play shuffled on to the stage, with no regard for propriety of character or costume, by a company comprising doubtless some good actors, but with supernumeraries who stood on the stage and gaped at the pit or ogled at the boxes." As if carried away by the charm of his rhetoric, he enlarges to the extent of picturing plays

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[1] These statements appear in *Dramatic Table Talk*, p. 64, and similar ones in *The Drama of Yesterday* and *Thirty Years at the Play*.

"pitchforked on to the stage" with "Bœotian supernumeraries staring with bovine stupidity directly away from the action." [1] To say the least, these pictures are highly colored.

Stated in such strong phraseology, these indictments do not seem to tally with any of the facts we have so far considered. It is surely not true, as many are led to infer, that before the Bancrofts pitch-fork staging was the only kind familiar to the British public. By no possible construction could these statements be applied to the work of Vestris, Macready, Charles Kean, or even Phelps. In the case of Kean and Macready, as we have seen, very special care was taken to avoid "bovine stupidity" of "Bœotian supernumeraries," and surely of no other department of the work of any of these producers could the statements of Scott and Knight be justly made.

If they were meant to apply merely to the state of the London stage from 1860 to 1865, they might more easily be defended: but even for this period they are decidedly overdrawn. It is, to say the least, surprising that the stage, from a condition of unparallelled magnificence in 1855, with Kean at the Princess's and Vestris at the Lyceum, should within five years have dropped to the condition of slovenliness and degradation these writers would have us imagine. In making his statements Scott is provokingly vague. Does he mean them to apply to all managements and theatres, or simply to those where comedy was produced? What stages were shamefully inadequate? What actors so ridiculously clad and untrue to nature? What actresses were clothed from the rag-bag? When he takes the pains to specify, he is not very persuasive, for he takes us in company with his favorite author, not to see Phelps at Drury Lane or Fechter at the Lyceum, not even Charles Mathews and Buckstone at the Haymarket or old Ben Webster at the Adelphi: he leads us rather to see Bob

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[1] *History of the Stage during the Victorian Era*, pp. 3 ff., and 21 ff.

Romer, of no particular reputation at any time, take a benefit at the Royalty, an East London house of the very lowest character.[1] He might as well attempt to prove the present wretched condition of costumes and scenery by taking us to the Britannia at Hoxton or to the Elephant and Castle.

I have yet to find any notice of such a sudden decline in stage conditions on the part of those who wrote contemporary criticisms of the stage. In the files of the *Theatrical Observer* and the *Theatrical Journal*, whose writers had lived through the "palmy days" of Macready and Kean, there is a great deal said of the absence of great drama, but little or nothing as to the absence of stage equipment. Indeed their editors repeatedly rejoiced that the excessive liberality bestowed on revivals by Kean had been somewhat abated by Chatterton at Drury Lane in 1863. On this point Henry Morley's diary is suggestive. It records impressions of a constant theatre-goer, whose choice of plays was as broad as the dramatic field, during a period of fifteen years from 1851 to 1866. In all he has to say of the stage either in the early or the later part of his experience, there is hardly a word concerning slovenly staging. On the other hand, he repeatedly praises the work of manager, costumer, and painter. Under the date September 22, 1860, the very year which Scott considered the worst, Morley jotted: "The unhallowed union of music with the drama, so deeply abhorred by Herr von Wolzogen, is not sanctioned at Sadler's Wells; and while the stage is always well appointed, scenic display is made, even to a remarkable degree, expressive of poetical intention"; and he adds the specific description: "The expulsion of Coriolanus from Rome is presented in a capital stage picture *by the grouping of the mob*." [2] At the Lyceum on October 6 of the same year, he finds "that not even the personal efforts of Mrs. Keeley and Madame Céleste, the beautiful scenery and dresses, and indulgence for an opening night, could save it [Taylor's *Brigand and His Banker*] from the fate it merited." On December 29 he says of a burlesque, *Timour the Tartar*, at the Olympic: "Its four scenes are admirably appointed, and, though not the costliest, perhaps the best burlesque scenes of the year." Especially to the point is his comment on the Haymarket production of *Our American Cousin*, for the Haymarket as the home of comedy was the special object of the Robertsonian wrath. Morley's entry for November 16, 1861, states that the play "will have a long run at the Haymarket, not only because it is well mounted and acted, and presents Mr. Buckstone in a Yankee character, but more especially for the sake of a sketch new to our stage, given by an actor hitherto unknown in London, Mr. Sothern, with an eccentric and whimsical elaboration that is irresistibly amusing." On December 7, 1861, he notes that "at the Olympic a new comedietta, also from the French, has been produced under the name of *Court Cards*, with good scenes, delightfully brilliant and picturesque last-century court dresses, and finished acting." Of Mr. and Mrs. Wigan at the St. James's he remarks that they "display the highest finish of English acting in the French manner."

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[1] *Dramatic Table Talk*, p. 64.

[2] *Journal of a London Playgoer*. The italics are mine.

Although Mr. Pemberton admits a possible exception in the case of melodrama, "where some attention had to be paid to spectacular effect," Scott and Knight make no such distinction. There cannot, however, be the smallest doubt as to the elaborate staging of Boucicault and Fechter, which by 1865 had achieved great popularity. Even Fechter's opening of the Lyceum in 1863 occasioned the following entry in Morley's diary: "Clean and elegant house, efficient actors, a well-appointed stage, and a picturesque romantic play that interests the public."

If the "legitimate" revivals of Phelps at Drury Lane are meant, there appears to be no greater reason for the condemnation. Of the Chatterton-Phelps revival of *Manfred* Morley declares: "Costly and beautiful as the spectacle of *Manfred* is, it really blends with and illustrates Byron's verse." That he feared too much rather than too little care in the production of plays, is indicated by the following remarks:

> It has been proved conclusively that scenery alone will not draw full houses to Drury Lane, yet *Manfred* crams the pit and fills the theatre. There has seldom been a piece mounted with more lavish and picturesque scenic effect, or with a stronger host of supernumeraries, than Mr. Falconer's *Bonnie Dundee*. Nevertheless *Bonnie Dundee* could be played only for a few nights to almost empty houses. It is quite true that beautiful and apt scenery, harmonizing with the descriptions and the few incidents of the poem, is necessary to the successful stage appointment of Lord Byron's *Manfred*. It is not less true that a play with little dramatic action, even with the help of the scenery, and Mr. Phelps in the chief character, would not draw for a week, if there were not a high intellectual power in the thought and language.[1]

He even asks: "Why give us plays without words?" Condemning for this reason a part of Reade's *It is Never Too Late to Mend*, he comments:

> The plot stops while the audience is edified by a transformation of the stage into a treadmill, and of the supernumeraries into convict gangs. Upon this repulsive excrescence, which does not advance the story by a syllable, the manager spent his chief energies in the way of scenic effect, for it has yielded the most costly scenes in the play, a perspective of radiating prison corridors seen from the centre of a model prison, with practicable tiers of galleries, and iron staircases, and cells, and gas-lights. For the rest, there is enough scenic effect. Real water comes out of a stage pump, and there is a fine stage picture of an Australian ravine.

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[1] See entries in Morley's *Journal*, Oct. 17, and Nov. 17, 1863.

If the field of production referred to by Pemberton, Scott, and the rest, was that of burlesque, we have abundant testimony from the celebrated pantomime writer, E. L. Blanchard, in his scrappy diaries, to show that even this manner of performance was not "pitch-forked" on to the stage. It is the more interesting, perhaps, because edited by Clement Scott himself. Although many plays meet with a hearty "very bad," almost no reproach is aimed at the costumes or scenery. Some of his entries follow:

> February 1, 1859. To Haymarket, and see *Undine:* scenery very good and comic business excellent.
>
> January 21, 1860. Look in at the Lyceum: see comic business: Marshall's fitting as usual very well, and one good transformation scene.
>
> January 12, 1861. Evening at the Lyceum: see Calcott's charming scene.
>
> January 25, 1863. To the Princess's. . . . Well pleased with pantomime; well played and beautifully put upon the stage.
>
> February 5, 1863. At Surrey, *Heart of Midlothian* — well got up.—St. James's, see adaptation of *Lady Audley's Secret:* not badly done; scenery by Beverley very good indeed.[1]

There is nothing in Blanchard's diary to indicate that stage management was "down at the heels," or that costuming was regularly done from the "rag-bag."

As for one of Scott's "old men of sixty" who "played lovers of twenty-one," the veteran Charles Mathews, Blanchard writes (October 26, 1863): "To Haymarket. Charles Mathews's reappearance in *Cool as a Cucumber:* after Parisian triumphs plays admirably, and looks wonderfully fresh." In 1864 the *Theatrical Observer* speaks of him as "Mr. Charles Mathews, who seems to be perpetually advancing in his art and perplexingly retrograding in his age," and who "enacted the impulsive and impressible Orlando Middlemark with that polished ease and sparkling vivacity which form his prominent attributes."[1] Pemberton calls this "pattering through his parts." How much depends upon choice of words!

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[1] These citations are all from the *Life and Reminiscences*.

I have already run the risk of too much emphasis upon a secondary point. I might otherwise supply much more evidence to show that the impressions created concerning the stage before 1865, especially through the writings of Scott and Knight, if not wholly false, are certainly unfair to the stage conditions reformed by the Robertsonians. The Bancrofts, in their modest book, make no such extravagant claims for their work in stage setting. What is more, to judge from the press notices, it would appear that in many respects their staging was in no wise remarkable for its advance upon contemporary conditions. For instance, the *Pall Mall Gazette* speaks even harshly of the scenery of *Society*, and at considerable length. The critic declared:

> With the exception of the Square scene . . . [the play would have been] more effective if it had been mounted with a more liberal hand and with a better sense of the exigencies of the scene. In a comedy which aims at realism, and the essential character of which demands *vraisemblance*, the furniture and accessories are of great importance. . . . One does not expect to find in Tottenham Court Road the elegance which Mme. Vestris exhibited at the Lyceum. We may reasonably expect to see a fashionable drawing room in the noble mansion of Lord Ptarmigant furnished with more than one chair and with a carpet of visible proportions.

The *Daily News* also complained of the same weaknesses. Granting that *Society* was but a small beginning, and that *Caste* represents much better the improvements made by the Bancrofts in setting, these comments show that audiences and critics alike were acquainted, not only with stage finery, but with scenic realism much more elaborate than anything the Bancrofts put on their stage before

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[1] Dec. 24.

Caste in 1867; and even in that play, it is doubtful if London saw an astonishing advance upon the work they were already familiar with.

The truth, we may conclude, was that, although the stage in 1860 was less lavish in point of splendor than it had been under Vestris, Charles Kean, or even, perhaps, Macready, it had by no means fallen to the depths of shoddy indecency that Scott would have us believe. Viewed as a whole, it was already capable of achieving realism as well as romance with finish both in costume and scenery, and in these respects, at least, represented rather a *blasé* contempt for too great elaboration than a dramatic bankruptcy, in which none of the amenities and refinements in theatrical representation were to be seen in London theatres.

It was, indeed, probable that at the Haymarket, with such celebrities as Buckstone and Mathews to attract, less care was taken to stage plays expensively than elsewhere among the important theatres. Aside from the statements by Scott and Knight, however, I have seen no evidence, which in any way could be called contemporary, that represents the sorry state of affairs these writers depict. No doubt, in looking back from the more elegantly appointed stages of 1880 and 1900, these commentators remembered the conditions of 1860 as poor in comparison. Besides, Scott's unbounded devotion to Robertson, his old friend and co-worker for dramatic reform, with whom he had lived the life of the Arundel Club fellowship, and eaten at Tom Hood's "Friday Nights," may excuse an inclination, amounting to belief, to prove that Robertson and his little band of co-workers had saved the stage from the destruction toward which they fancied it was hurrying. The greater the darkness, therefore, the greater Robertson's light.

If, however, we view the conditions of 1860 as abundant evidence warrants, they were the natural outcome of constant and laudable progress toward better workmanship in every branch of stagecraft; and if a retrograde movement had set in, the effects of it were by no means as striking as Scott would have us believe.

What I have said in an attempt to create a right perspective against which to view the Prince of Wales's management, is motivated by no desire to belittle the accomplishments of Robertson and the Bancrofts. They have received no more praise than is their due. It has been rather my aim to point out an interesting dramatic phenomenon with its direct bearing upon literary history. There was in the conditions out of which the "drama-comedy" of Robertson was created, a much more complicated problem than the statements I have attacked would lead us to believe. It appears to me more reasonable and far more consistent with all the facts I have been able to ascertain, to suppose that the great current of dramatic development in the nineteenth century had set in strongly and with inevitable tendencies long before the appearance of the Bancrofts or their author. Starting with the most unfavorable conditions of the monopoly, it had found its source in the "illegitimate" that flooded not only the minor houses, but even the theatre of the great Kemble himself. With Elliston it rose to a menacing flood, swelled by tributaries from France and Germany: English audiences were swept away by it, and the stage itself was slowly wrenched from its conventional snags and set afloat on the new tide. If there was stagnation in 1860, it was the quiet rather of the flow than of the ebb. It presented to anyone who understood its movements, an unlimited opportunity for success. It was the peculiar distinction of the Bancrofts and Robertson, that they did understand its significance; and while they did not, like Boucicault, abandon themselves to it without chart or helm, they nevertheless made use of its strength to propel their little bark in the direction that was both inevitable and the way to better things.

Chapter XVIII

ROBERTSONIAN COMEDY: AT THE PRINCE OF WALES'S

WHEN Miss Wilton, in company with H. J. Byron, prospected at the *Dusthole,* as the Queen's Theatre off Tottenham Court Road was previously known, the orange-peel aimed at her head from the pit did not dislodge her. If anything, it was a challenge. The Dusthole became the Prince of Wales's. A thousand pounds borrowed from a brother-in-law — all honor to his memory — started this venture, which ended in nothing less than a theatrical revolution. Although Miss Wilton had ambitions that looked to success in the higher departments of comedy, she apparently began the Prince of Wales's management in 1865 with no other immediate purpose than the continuance under her direction of the successes won at the Strand. Her first innovations were merely in the audience part of her house. Comfortably upholstered stalls with antimacassars and carpets, she boasts, were first enjoyed by English audiences at her little theatre. "The pampered audiences of the present day," she adds in her memoirs, "little know of how much my modest undertaking was the pioneer, and would hardly credit that a carpet in the stalls was, until then, unknown."

A Winning Hazard was the auspicious title of the opening piece, April 15, 1865. Byron's *Somnambula* was the after-piece. *War to the Knife*, also by Byron, followed as the second principal production. Contrary to Miss Wilton's expectation, however, the opening of her management was to mark the end of her interest in burlesque rather than the beginning of a more brilliant career in this kind for herself and her author, Byron. The destiny of the stage had a vastly more important service to impose upon her, of which, at this time, she had only the faintest anticipation.

The one circumstance entirely new — and, I believe, adequate to explain the revolution which was later effected — was the assembling under one roof of a considerable body of younger players, all of whom had grown up under the conditions of the free stage, and all of whom, besides, had the highest ideals of excellence in their art.

There was among them no Buckstone to dictate upon the false grounds of his own long experience in the older school of acting. They were free to follow the lead of their own insight and intelligence. What is more, they knew clearly what they wanted to do. Singly they might have been many years in bringing about a radical improvement of stage art, but thus united under the competent and inspiring leadership of such a woman as Miss Wilton and such a progressive playwright as Robertson, who soon made himself their master, they all felt an increased strength of purpose and gained a clearer perception of the forces which were directing them and which they in turn were directing.

I cannot, however, agree with Clement Scott's belief that "had *Society* been produced at the Haymarket of those days and been damned, Robertson in all probability would never have been heard of again, and the gaiety of a nation would have been eclipsed." [1]

In spite of Buckstone's own belief to the contrary, I do not believe that *Society*, with men like Mathews and Sothern in the leading rôles, would necessarily have failed. I am still less certain that so strong a personality as Robertson's would have broken down if the play had failed. In any event, I am convinced that the gaiety of a nation would not have been eclipsed. If any one fact concerning the period we have discussed is surer than any other it is that forces were at work which, quite apart from Robertson, would have produced very similar results — if not in that decade, certainly in the next.

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[1] *Thirty Years at the Play*, p. 24.

Robertson was a profound student of the contemporary drama: Miss Wilton, with equal certainty, was the living exponent of that drama on the stage. No mere chance brought them together. Their union at the Prince of Wales's was almost as inevitable as it was timely. Had H. J. Byron not happened to know of his friend's rejected manuscript of *Society*, and had the manuscript itself actually been lost, and had Byron not chanced to recommend the play to Miss Wilton, it is hardly probable that the new movement would not have continued. Even if *Society* had not inaugurated its popular success, the same results in some other form would surely have come about. If there was chance in the production of *Society* at the Prince of Wales's in 1865, there was in it just as certainly the workings of an *évolution créatrice*.

If we have dimmed the somewhat dazzling contrast with which the work at the Prince of Wales's is usually introduced, we have done so merely to gain a clearer perspective with which to view the fact itself. If the Robertsonians did not build their stage anew, they did what was vastly more important, they turned to good use what was generally supposed to be a menace. The great tide of modernism, vulgarized by sensation and a contempt for art standards, they diverted into a deep and adequate channel, purified it, and gave to it a safe direction toward the more prosperous future.

This point of view will help us to understand many puzzling aspects of their reforms. If we search for specific changes resulting from their management, we are baffled. The principle of a small highly specialized company had been familiar on the stage since, at least, the management of Vestris at the Olympic in 1831. The Bancrofts reaped also the benefits resulting from the long run, adopting Boucicault's principle of engaging actors for individual characters. The one change most surely theirs was the reduction of the program to a single play.[1] They seconded Boucicault's efforts to better the conditions, not only of playwrights, but of actors as well. As scenic improvements, they tell us, a blast of snow at the door in *Ours*, and in *Caste* ceilings, and practicable locks, were introduced. But Fechter introduced ceilings as early as 1863, and in *Othello* had used a lock and key.[2]

I mention these facts, now forgotten, not with a desire to rob the Bancrofts of the glory to be derived from ceilings and locks, but rather with a purpose to show that their really individual and important contribution lay in far more important directions. Such staging as their plays demanded was simple and wholly unpretentious. At first, it was even inadequate. The truly great contribution that the Bancrofts, with Robertson's counsel, made to the English drama was not the stage effects themselves, but the artistry with which they were managed. Quite regardless of sensation, they aimed to make their scenery wholly appropriate. They sought to make their audiences feel at home with the characters of the play. Artistry had succeeded to sensation and display as a fundamental principle of management. The ideal of realistic representation was claimed by Vestris, but Vestris aimed chiefly at refinement. Even her milkmaids wore silks and kid gloves. In her day there was realism enough of the *Newgate Calendar* type. Her duty, as she may have conceived it, was first to civilize the stage. With her there was no realism of the ugly and vulgar. She had excelled in the clouds of Olympus and in the elegance of London drawing-rooms.

The Bancrofts, espousing the same ideals, took the next and all-important step onward, to the plane of artistic truth. While their predecessors had sought vividness for stage effect by display, refinement, or sensation, it is to the lasting glory of the Bancrofts that, with a surer artistic perception, they sought stage beauty, where alone it can be found, in simplicity, aptness, and sincerity. Their work was not so much the creation of realistic stage facilities, as it was a protest against the futile use of those that already existed. The keenest observers of their endeavors appreciated this merit. Of the production of *Caste*, which the Bancrofts considered their first important effort at scenic realism, one critic remarked:

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[1] Bancrofts, p. 73.

[2] Baker, p. 295, mentions the use of ceilings. For the lock and key in *Othello*, see ridicule of their use in *Theat. Jour.*, Oct. 30, 1861.

> The scene-painter, the carpenter, and the costumier no longer usurp the place of the author and actor. With the aid of only two simple scenes — a boudoir in Mayfair and a humble lodging in Lambeth — Mr. Robertson has succeeded in concentrating an accumulation of incident and satire more poignant than might be found in all the sensational dramas of the last half century. The whole secret of his success is — truth![1]

I do not know whose criticism this is, but it appears to me one of the clearest and truest appraisals of the Robertsonian work. With the Bancrofts, as with their author, the artistic emphasis was not on things external. They sought instead to realize essential dramatic truth by unconventional characterization, dramatic ideas, proportion, and fitness of matter and the form of expression. Thus we find it difficult to formulate in clear-cut terms the Robertsonian improvements. They were too delicate and elusive for definition or analysis. They were in the realm of spirit. They defied tabulation.

In comedy, no doubt, much more of stage convention remained than in other departments of the drama. The work of Fechter and Boucicault had perhaps left the system at the Haymarket untouched. Except for the changes that had resulted from Mathews's presence there, and the improvements due to the general progress of the century, the Haymarket was probably the most reactionary of all the important theatres. Since this was the historical home of comedy, it naturally afforded the Robertsonians the contrast their movement needed, but by no means the contrast of mere degradation. The first thing for the new movement to do was to brush from the stage all the remaining conventionalities. What others had done in part the Bancrofts did thoroughly. They saw that no compromise whatever between the new spirit and the old practices was possible. Advance, they believed, was not to be made by merely utilizing the stage facilities already developed in the most telling manner, or even by improving these facilities, but by giving to each production a character all its own. The really new thing at the Prince of Wales's was not, then, stage equipment, or even realism: it was a spirit of freshness in utilizing accumulated advantages, and a spirit of war upon imitation and tradition. For every play they produced, whether it was by Robertson, Reade, Boucicault, or Shakespeare, they sought a new and individual mode of expression to accord with the nature of the composition. If their interpretation ran counter to all tradition, so much the better. To show how far their spirit of originality would carry them, we may note their revival of Reade's *Masks and Faces*. Although the play had won success by its traditional happy ending, they saw that an effect of greater truth and beauty would result from a pathetic close. They induced the author to make this dangerous alteration, with great benefit to the artistry of his work.[1]

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[1] Quoted in the *Life and Writings of T. W. Robertson*, p. 205, from "one of the most eminent critics of the day."

If I am charged with putting my finger on no definite marks of progress, my defence is that the service they rendered at the Prince of Wales's lay in the subtle and intangible arts of diction, manner, coöperation, and stage business, and these things defy statement. Anything that might be merely *said* of the Robertsonian work, might also be said about several of the earlier managements.

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[1] *The Bancrofts*, p. 147 ff.

In this dilemma, we may find help from a passage in Robertson's own vein as critic in the *Illustrated Times*[1]:

> In the course of the last fifteen years, the whole aspect of theatrical affairs has so changed that the man of forty summers may consider himself a sort of connecting link between what was the stage and what it is; between the buckskin breeches, top-boots, and white hats of the comedies of Colman Junior, and the gibus, patent leathers, flappy trousers, and frizzy beard of modern melodrama as it talks, bows, banters, fights duels, and feigns indifference.

Particularizing first of managers, he informs us that the old type — perhaps Elliston was his model — was "versatile, bustling, loving, but angry and firm, a jack-of-all-trades." The new manager, such as the Bancrofts replaced, belonged, Robertson tells us, to one of two classes: either the purely commercial or the equally dangerous actor-manager variety. Of the mere dramatic trader, he says that he puts costumier and property man above the author and his manuscript, and that he is ready to turn anything to account that will bring him money. He "will buy a quantity of damaged velvets for a fabulously small sum, after which he will search for an author to write him a piece for the velvets." The actor-manager, however, is usually a "good second or third-rate sort of artist." Robertson adds: "Just now the stage is terribly plagued by various sorts of these self-sufficient *entrepreneurs*," whom he describes as "domineering, jealous, and tame," and declares that they "torture" new men into "ineffective and passionless delivery."

In this vivid paragraph lies the crux of our problem.

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[1] Many of his "Lounger" papers are reprinted, this passage among them, in the *Life and Writings of T. W. Robertson.*

With the Bancrofts, there was no more of the damaged-velvet trading, no more lording it on the part of a "second- or third-rate sort of artist," no more domineering jealousy, and best of all, no more torture of new men into "ineffective and passionless delivery." The tyranny of actor, scene-painter, and manager was replaced by the genial but far more exacting domination of art. Here was at last a genuine freedom on the stage. The Robertsonians were the first to avail themselves of dramatic liberty in its broadest sense. Freedom of the stage without freedom for the art on the stage, was but little gain. The houses of Parliament in 1843 had granted liberty to the theatres. The Prince of Wales's under the Bancrofts, conferred liberty upon the drama.

The first and surest indication of the new lease of freedom was the emancipation of the dramatist. What Boucicault had accomplished for himself by the arts of a charlatan, the Bancrofts, in the beaten way of the respectable drama, conferred upon their dramatist, Robertson. As we have already remarked, aside from Boucicault himself, no author since Colman had so abundantly profited from dramatic composition. If to-day an income of £3,760 seems paltry to a practical dramatist, in the eighteen-sixties it was a vast compensation. This kind of freedom would, perhaps, have come by itself. But the Bancrofts did for their author something more significant: they gave him a position of guidance and direction in the mounting of his own plays. They allowed his imagination to shape their rare material for the best results obtainable. Robertson accepted the leadership in exactly the same spirit, and chose rather to coöperate than to dictate. Although he appears to have viewed with indifference the changes made by the Bancrofts in the externals of realism, he approved of them and allowed them to become a part of his workmanship.[1] In all such particulars there was perfect accord, because the spirit of art and not that of pride, personality, or greed was supremely in command.

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[1] Filon, p. 123.

Robertson, fortunately, possessed a gift, rare with originators of literature, of making vivid to his actors the characteristics they were to impersonate. In this respect many others with superior intellectual gifts might have failed even with the favorable opportunity the Prince of Wales's company afforded. Robertson's gift of impartment was, perhaps, the most important of all the felicitous circumstances under which the new comedy came into existence. Not only do the Bancrofts themselves pay glowing tribute to this faculty, but also Clement Scott and John Hare.

> I do not know why [Scott writes], but to me Robertson seemed to read his plays and act them at the same time. He could convey so graphically his idea of the people he created. To hear him read a play was to immediately grasp the meaning of every character. Perhaps they were so very, very human and true to life, and perhaps, who knows, it was this wonderful facility for expression which helped so materially to bring success.

Probably W. S. Gilbert had the same qualification in mind when he remarked, "I look upon stage management as now understood, as having been absolutely invented by him." Most significant is the tribute of John Hare, who created the most vivid bit of Robertson's realism in *Society*, and who, until his recent death, was to our own generation a delightful reminder of the delicate artistry inaugurated at the Prince of Wales's in 1865.

> He had a gift peculiar to himself [said Hare] and one which I have never seen in any other author, of conveying by some rapid and almost electrical suggestion to the actor an insight into the character assigned to him. As nature was the basis of his own work, so he sought to make actors understand it should be theirs. He thus founded a school of natural acting which completely revolutionized the then existing methods, and by so doing did incalculable good to the stage.

These reminiscences, I believe, lay bare the very heart of the Robertsonian movement. Whatever advances had been made in acting and management before the time of the Bancrofts — and these were considerable — had been mainly in things external. Costumes and scenery, dialogue and action, had all, more or less completely, achieved an illusion of life. The Bancrofts, under the leadership of Robertson, infused into these externals an inner vitality. Its nature was as indefinable as it was rare. Archer calls it "a minutely modern style of acting."[1] The Bancrofts themselves called it "unity of tone" and also "the spirit of refinement."[2] It was all these; but it was more. Related to the history of art in general, it was the all-important attitude of mind — the disposition to approach their materials from a wholly new point of view; a determination to shape these materials, and not to be shaped by them. For their effects the Robertsonians studied not the annals of the stage, but life itself, observed at first hand. Thus they gave freedom to the drama to develop in accord with its own most vital principle.

As for their style of acting, there is little to add to what we already know of the tendencies of the day. It was distinctly a composite of the "character acting" of such men as Sothern, Hare, and Bancroft, and of the burlesque manner of Miss Wilton. Her style had been cultivated in the newer, freer, and more realistic writings of H. J. Byron, who, as we should recall, was one of Robertson's closest friends, and who actually introduced Robertson to his manageress Miss Wilton.

I do not mean to imply that they made no improvements in the technique of acting. All who have written of the Bancrofts from personal observation make clear that they made many. The changes, however, were more in degree than in kind. Never before in our period had a whole company of actors abandoned themselves with such complete faith to a development of a purely realistic manner of delivery, and never before had such a company had the criticism and direction of so keen an observer and so true an artist as Robertson. These were conditions which Shakespeare himself might have envied if we may judge from Hamlet's directions to the players. Others, perhaps, had been as realistic in principle, but no one had yet appeared with Robertson's keenness of observation, or his power to distinguish between the truth of life and that of the stage. No one in the stage life of London, perhaps, knew French life better than Robertson. He was himself an expert mimic of the French. This skill had often eked out his scant earnings. When, therefore, in *War* he introduces a Frenchman, he is careful to remark: "The author requests this part may be played with a slight French accent. He is not to pronounce the words absurdly or duck his head toward his stomach like the conventional stage Frenchman." Of a German part he states: "He is not to be made wilfully comic."

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[1] Ward's *Reign of Victoria*, ii, p. 582.

[2] *The Bancrofts*, p. 76.

Similarly of a captain of the royal navy, he directed, "Capt. Sound is not to be dressed in uniform, but in the morning dress of a gentleman. His manner is to be hearty but not rough, in every respect that of a captain of a man-of-war and not of a master of a half-penny steamboat."

I half suspect that in these directions there was a sarcastic thrust at the methods of some company with which Robertson was not in sympathy, and that those who were expected to profit most by them may have found them impertinent. They point, however, to the method of his reform so far as acting is concerned. Perhaps no touch preserved to us in his printed works is more significant than the speech with which he intended Buckstone himself to end the play of *Progress*.[1] The stage directions specified the exact position of the participants in the tableau at the fall of the curtain as follows:

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[1] Buckstone, however, did not play the part; possibly he did not relish the humor.

Ferne, Eva, Lord Mompesson, *going to the door.*	Arthur, Doctor, *congratulating each other and seated.*	Miss M. *at door disgusted.*
Bunnythorne, *seated.*		Bob, *seated.*

The author then facetiously makes Bunnythorne close the play with the satirical thrust:

> In my time, we should have all stood in a pleasant half-circle round the stage, and thanked our friends the public, for their kind applause, but nothing is as it should be now-a-days, everything is going to the ——
> CURTAIN QUICKLY.

Such comments were certainly unnecessary in plays designed for presentation by the Prince of Wales's company, and none appear in them. On such points the Robertsonians were all in accord. All were eager to be unconventional and natural. This does not mean, however, that, if they were to appear before us as they did before the audiences of 1865, we should find them natural. Doubtless they would seem no less quaint in manner than the costumes they wore. Nor does it mean that they were without exaggeration for their own times. Theirs was realism and unconventionality in conscious progress. In advancing these tendencies the Robertsonians had far outdistanced any other school of acting during the century. Miss Wilton retained much of her burlesque exuberance. She was criticised in some quarters for what was called her "rolly-poly." Boucicault rebuked these critics, and found her "rolly-poly" eminently realistic.

This leads us to recall that Robertson and Boucicault appear to have been perfectly in agreement as to the effect to be produced by acting. Robertson, indeed, was extremely deferential to Boucicault's judgment. Even as late as 1870, when *Ours* was repeated, Robertson wrote to Mrs. Bancroft:

> I was pleased to find Boucicault descanting on it to a chosen few. He said that not only was the general acting of the piece equally admirable, but that he had never — including Paris — seen such refinement of effect combined as in the performance of the second act.[1]

Although in all this the Bancroft movement was in many respects the product of the times and not as greatly in advance of their period as many believe, they were nevertheless contributors of the very greatest moment to English stagecraft. They combined and used influences which otherwise were scattered and undirected. Better yet, they were gifted with an artistic imagination superior in point of taste and achievement to that of all other workers of the epoch. As the *Daily News* declared upon their retirement,

> they had produced pieces genuinely English that came straight out of the ways of English life. They had made their people move, and talk, and demean themselves just as English people of the class represented do in English homes. They had reasserted the claims of English life in two ways—in the story of the play and in the manner of its acting.

Robertson and the Bancrofts, then, viewed in their relation to the past, were as much a consequence as a cause. They were no more the creators of a new comedy than they were the chief exponents of the theory and practice of the most advanced dramatic tendencies of their day. What their antecedents were, we have, I believe, sufficiently established. The growth of which the Robertsonians were the fullest expression was as old as the century. Although, when viewed in its external aspects, its history is that of French domination; when regarded internally and organically, its most constant and effective

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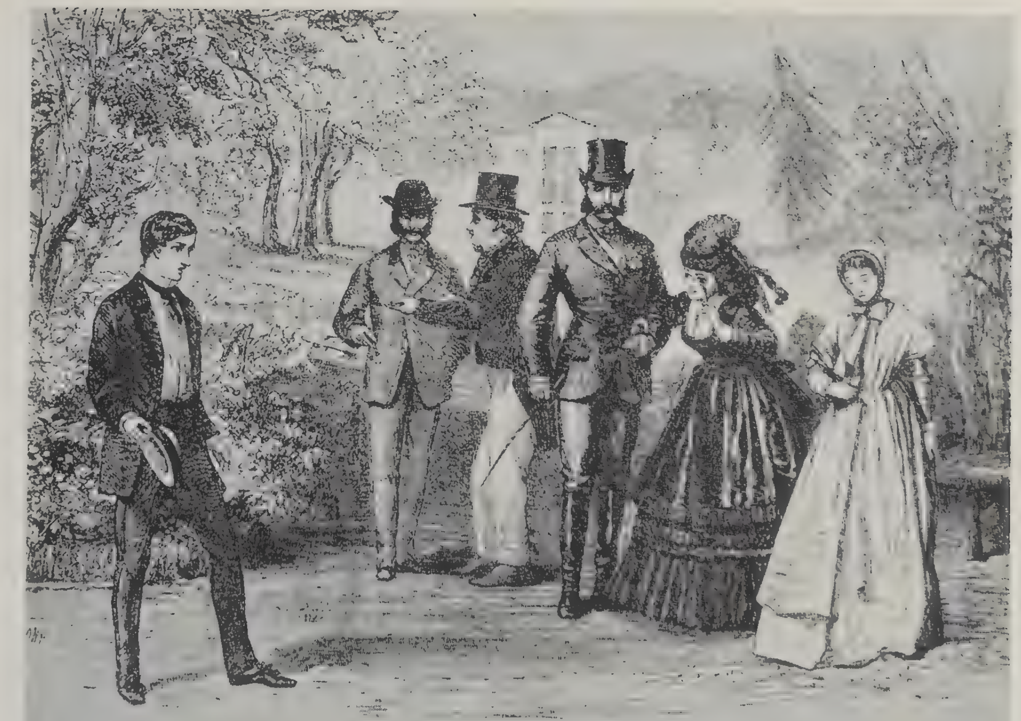
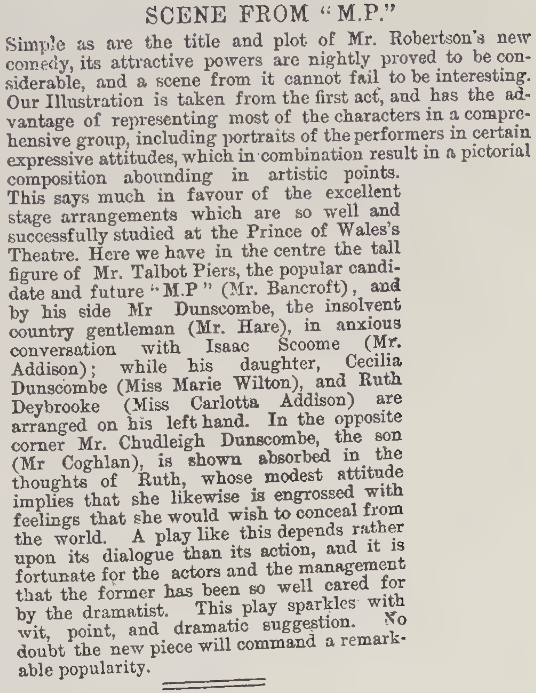
[1] *Life and Writings of T. W. Robertson*, p. 278.



SCENE FROM "M.P." AT THE PRINCE OF WALES'S THEATRE.



SCENE FROM "M.P."

Simple as are the title and plot of Mr. Robertson's new comedy, its attractive powers are nightly proved to be considerable, and a scene from it cannot fail to be interesting. Our Illustration is taken from the first act, and has the advantage of representing most of the characters in a comprehensive group, including portraits of the performers in certain expressive attitudes, which in combination result in a pictorial composition abounding in artistic points. This says much in favour of the excellent stage arrangements which are so well and successfully studied at the Prince of Wales's Theatre. Here we have in the centre the tall figure of Mr. Talbot Piers, the popular candidate and future "M.P" (Mr. Bancroft), and by his side Mr Dunscombe, the insolvent country gentleman (Mr. Hare), in anxious conversation with Isaac Scoome (Mr. Addison); while his daughter, Cecilia Dunscombe (Miss Marie Wilton), and Ruth Deybrooke (Miss Carlotta Addison) are arranged on his left hand. In the opposite corner Mr. Chudleigh Dunscombe, the son (Mr Coghlan), is shown absorbed in the thoughts of Ruth, whose modest attitude implies that she likewise is engrossed with feelings that she would wish to conceal from the world. A play like this depends rather upon its dialogue than its action, and it is fortunate for the actors and the management that the former has been so well cared for by the dramatist. This play sparkles with wit, point, and dramatic suggestion. No doubt the new piece will command a remarkable popularity.

Contemporary Wood-cut of a Bancroft-Robertson Scene,
with Press Comment

increment is seen to come from the stream of life on the stage itself, and this was, as it must always be, national and indigenous, transforming influences from without in accordance with its own genius, and becoming thereby richer and more varied, subtler and more expressive, and for the period we have set ourselves to study, more responsive to the national life it sought to interest and reflect.

Into this complicated and interesting development entered first the temper and judgment of the English theatrical public. Ruthlessly the *bête humaine*, which Filon says was at the door of the theatres, broke through the barriers of convention and tradition, casting away one after another the sacred remnants. First went the "Kemble religion," then Kean's romanticism, then Macready's "metaphysics," then the Anglo-French compromise of the younger Kean, and lastly the traditionalism of Phelps. Correspondingly, the popular affection fastened upon the scattered elements of which the coming drama was the compound. Among these the most notable were melodrama and the type of comedy and burlesque from France that Madame Vestris did more than any other person to introduce. With these forms had come about a new spirit of realistic interpretation which spread to every department of drama, but which, until Robertson availed himself of its results, had remained merely an undirected tendency. It had even taken possession of the legitimate drama in the triumph of Fechter. Let us not, however, suppose that the vital thing, which for want of a better term I have called the stream of life on the stage, was merely French. It had all the characteristics of England. If the plays the public liked were French, their adaptations had to be heavily Anglicized, and the mode of representation accorded them was one which English actors and English audiences had worked out between them. It reflected far less the manners of the Porte St. Martin than those of the clubs and streets of London. A striking indication of this English bent was the rapid decline in Fechter's popularity. Playgoers approved of what he had done for English drama, but could have only a limited admiration for his French manner. Before 1870 his vogue had passed, although the revolution he had achieved continued doubly in force.

A new stage life, then, and not utter barrenness, was the reality which confronted Robertson. Not all recognized in it the hope of the drama. The conservatives abhorred it as vulgar and degenerate. Boucicault had seen in it the sure means of winning the people. It was Robertson's glory that he saw in it the materials for a truly contemporary and vital drama. One step remained to take — the all-important one of procreation. The Robertsonians took it.

Robertson's own literary purpose seems to have been to prove to English audiences that the skill of French art might be borrowed, without its substance. Thus Robertson, like Boucicault, was among the first rightly to understand the spirit of nationalism in the drama. It was no more contemptible for the Victorian stage to borrow from France than for the Elizabethan to draw upon Italy, or the stage of Goethe and Schiller upon the English drama, or the stage of Corneille, Racine, and Molière upon the Spanish, Latin, and Greek. Nevertheless, in England before 1860, there existed among the critics and the well-wishers of the stage the utmost abhorrence of the "French invasion." With a few exceptions, like Jerrold, dramatists who looked to the stage for a livelihood availed themselves unstintingly of this cheap and easy supply. These hacks preferred translation and "free adaptation" to the more serious attempts to nationalize their borrowings. Some of the elements of French workmanship, such as the concentration of plot, avoidance of episodes serving merely for characterization or the amusement of the audience, and, in general, a nicer economy of material, had made their way not only into melodrama and light comedy, but also into the pretentious work of Knowles and Lytton. These writers, however, dealt with subject-matter and ideas as remote from contemporary England as France itself. Except that their plays were in English verse, there was little in them but their faults that could be considered truly English. Yet throughout the century from critics and veteran playgoers alike came the cry, "Let us have an English drama." They seem to have meant, "Let some one, doing exactly what Knowles, Bulwer, Talford, and Marston are attempting, rise to Olympian heights." By 1848, as we have seen, the "French invasion" had become so menacing that some thought it must be met by militant methods and driven by missiles from the stage, to make room for a truly English art.

The folly of this naïve delusion soon proved itself. During the next two decades, as never before or since, the London stage was deluged with translations, very slightly "adapted" from the French. Although the faithful moaned, the vulgar thoroughly enjoyed them. The loftier the stages on which they appeared, as for instance, the Princess's under royal patronage, the more violent the animosity aroused. But in the meantime a younger generation had grown up with less reverence for the "English tradition." They had, in fact, completely outgrown the prejudices of those who spurned French art simply because it was not English.

Among this newer class of playgoers — many of whom had the stage deeply at heart — were bands of young men precisely like the ones we know were associated with Robertson — Clement Scott, H. J. Byron, Tom Hood, and Tom Taylor. Through Robertson and Scott we learn something of the spirit shown at the Arundel Club and at Tom Hood's "Friday Nights," which were generally considered the fostering centres of the newer criticism. It was strongly against the "English tradition" and in favor of the new and vital art from France. In Scribe, Dumas, Augier,[1] they recognized a beauty and life that might be made English as well as French. They were frank to admit that there was nothing the English stage needed more. Scott writes: "We began to visit Paris, and to see different phases of art; we welcomed foreign artists to our shores without a murmur."

In the study of French methods, none of these enthusiasts was more eager and astute than Robertson. He adapted, translated, and borrowed without apology. He did much more: he caught the French delicacy and grace and acquired a profound knowledge of Parisian stagecraft. In him a love for the French methods was even stronger than his scorn for the shoddy English survivals. The doctrine, unformulated, of the Robertsonian revolution was that anything good in itself, whatever its origin, should be made available for the improvement of the English stage. Conversely, the new school believed that, without such improvement, the future of the English drama was without hope. Robertson's first success, *David Garrick*, from the French play *Sullivan*, shows the young writer already advanced beyond mere translation. His work later at the Prince of Wales's gave no outward sign of French influence. Even the story and the dramatic substance were taken from English society, as well as the characters. Not only were the personages of *Society* and *Caste* familiar on London thoroughfares, but the actions in which they were engaged were no longer the improbable adventures of a Gallicized Kean, but actions which, however improbable, were of a strictly English variety.

This aspect of Robertson's relations to the "illegitimate" has too frequently been emphasized to need further treatment. We should recall, however, that into the working out of his ideas there entered also a life-long experience as roving actor on the Lincoln circuit, in London, and even in Paris; also a period of service as prompter to Charles Mathews, the foremost English exponent of realism before Robertson and the Bancrofts. He himself was considered a "character actor" of the species of which Sothern was the most celebrated example in London. The novelty of this vivid but still exaggerated kind of realism, of course, gave it, for the contemporary observer, the appearance of reality. Such, after all, was Robertson's truth to nature. His plays displaced forever the old comic types which we have considered in the chapters on acting: for these he substituted individuals drawn from life, but drawn, not with an artist's intuitive grasp of reality, but rather with the eye of a competent delineator for vivid but exaggerated semblances of life.

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[1] Robertson's *Home* played successfully at the Haymarket by Sothern in 1869 was an adaptation from Augier's *L'Aventurière*.

Partly through the adaptation of novels like those of Reade and Dickens, partly through realistic character-sketching in plays by such writers as Jerrold, new and vital personages, who defied classification according to the familiar labels, had gradually appeared upon the London stage. Since they had grown out of burlesque and melodrama, they retained many traces of their origins. The most eminent of these in popular esteem was Lord Dundreary, who seems to have been as much the creation of the actor as of the author. It was Robertson's distinctive achievement to fill a whole play with such individuals.

His creations were, then, only better "character parts" than were common before 1865. Very clearly his work was not independent of the stream of life on the stage. The new French tributary to that stream supplied his dramaturgy; and the new English one, his method of characterization.

The character actors, Hare and Bancroft, and the burlesque actress, Miss Wilton, brought their similar attributes to vary and enrich the work of Robertson's imagination. They, like him, were products of their times, and utterly independent of each other before the fates had brought them together in the little Prince of Wales's Theatre. Thus during sixty years of the century conditions had been created that made possible an English comedy. If it was not of great moment in itself, it was, in its symbolism and its relationship, as significant as any literary phenomenon could very well be. In this sense Justin McCarthy was right in declaring: "Marie Wilton succeeded in reviving English Comedy upon the English stage." [1]

Whatever else may be ascribed to the work of the Bancrofts, two achievements of the first importance stand out to their lasting credit. The first was the introduction of a wholly new spirit of coöperation among managers, actors, and playwrights, dominated by a devotion, not to self-interest, not to personal glorification, but to popular art. Their second contribution to English stagecraft was the demonstration to the satisfaction of all, that a vital English comedy could be developed out of existing materials which the lofty-minded had spurned; and that a technique fashioned upon better French models was in no wise ruinous to English ideals and English spirit. They proved that a play might be literary in a truly English sense, while it was thoroughly of the spirit and workmanship of its own "vulgar age." That Robertson did not possess the genius of Shakespeare, or Dryden, or Congreve, or Sheridan, is a negligible platitude. He was a pioneer and not a perfecter. His technique and his ability were adequate to the needs of his day. It matters little if he observed nature less penetratingly than it is scrutinized by the more pretentious writers for the English-speaking stage to-day. The acuteness of his powers of observation was greatly in excess of any by which the stage since Sheridan had recorded contemporary life. The question of degree is the eternal problem of art. Robertson's solution was only a temporary and limited one. But he gave a new lease of life to a stage that in the minds of many had run its course and had but a blank future of vulgarity and sensation ahead. Injustice to the creative powers of Robertson has often been done by those who, bent upon tags and labels, apply the term "tea-cup and saucer" to his all but buried work. Similarly unfair, even if partly true, is Henry Arthur Jones's statement: "He [Robertson] drew many . . . pleasing characters and scenes most of them as essentially false as the falsities and theatricalities he supposed himself to be superseding." [1] Others with a hardly better historic sense have, on the contrary, attributed too much originality and innovation to Robertson, ignoring the fact that his work was essentially but a more active current in the greater stream of life that flowed constantly during the century. Although Knight was unduly depreciative of the tendencies that created Robertson, he at least was right in declaring that his "new order sprang naturally and without effort out of the old." [2] There was no void, complete and abysmal, like that which preceded the Restoration drama. To his contemporaries, beyond the smaller circle of his disciples and admirers, the Robertson innovations did not appear startling and revolutionary. "Now and then a pretty little piece like *School* gives us hope of a better state of things; but the enormous run of a hundred nights of such a piece of smartness and agreeableness must be prejudicial to the drama," was the comment of one contemporary voicing, perhaps, the older mood of criticism, but representing, nevertheless, the attitude of mind assumed by a great body of those who looked on at the play with the best interest of the drama at heart.[1] Even an older writer, who had lived through the "palmy days" of Maccready and Vestris, and during all these years had looked with a kind of prophetic yearning for a new drama, had only this to say upon the death of Robertson: "All I have to add is that we were better pleased with *Ours* last night at the Prince of Wales than with any modern piece we have recently seen in London." [2]

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[1] *The Bancrofts*, p. 120.

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[1] Introductory note to Filon's *The English Stage.*

[2] *A History of the Stage during the Reign of Victoria*, p. 14.

Let these observations serve us as checks upon the fanciful belief that the Robertson-Bancroft workmanship stood out incomparably above all other art upon the London stages. Judged not by the standards of 1893 or 1925, but by those of his own times, Robertson appears neither as a genius creating out of a void, nor as a pretender who dealt insincerely with realism. He was at one with his times, in that he welcomed to his stage every influence that his critical judgment approved; and he stood above his times in that he restrained and directed the forces which others had either spurned or allowed to operate without artistic direction. He infused these tendencies with his own exceedingly original and competent dramatic imagination, he created on his stage, more surely than in his book, a living drama. Those who have profited most by his work admit their debt. Sir Arthur Pinero wrote:

> It is my opinion, expressed here as it is elsewhere, that the present advanced condition of the English stage — throwing, as it does, a clear, natural light upon the manner and life of the people, where a few years ago there was nothing but moulding and tinsel — is due to the crusade begun by Mrs. Bancroft and yourself in your little Prince of Wales Theatre. When the history of the stage is adequately and faithfully written, Mrs. Bancroft's name and your own must be recorded with honor and gratitude.[3]

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[1] *Theat. Obs.*, April, 1870.

[2] A contributor to the *Theat. Jour.*, signing himself Beta, whose articles were generally of value and interest.

[3] Quoted in *Life and Writings of T. W. Robertson*, p. 278.

Students of literature who have proceeded upon the assumption that the Robertson movement marked an abrupt reversal of all stage conditions, and was therefore self-created and an original force, have, I believe, been at work in defiance of essential facts. In the history of the nineteenth-century English drama we have an interplay of influences such as may be found in any other dramatic or literary movement. During our period, this current was to be found more strongly defined in the work of producers and actors than in that of authors. It flowed by way of the theatres and not by way of the dramatist's closet. The authority and the creative energy were unquestionably in the audience and in the conditions on the stage itself. It was as clearly the lot of the dramatist to follow and obey. Thus the work of the Robertson school assumes, I believe, a new valuation. Created, as we have seen, from these stage conditions, it is one of the most hopeful assurances that the trend of theatrical vitality is, in the main, good. A force once at work does not easily become exhausted until it has found its characteristic expression. This is the real purport of the Robertsonian workmanship when traced to its origins in melodramas, burlesques, and all phases of French "illegitimacy," which, from the beginning of the century, had been regarded by lovers of the drama as the most despicable forms of art. The force which inspired and directed all the progress of the early Victorian drama was a blind yearning, all but universally felt, for a vital and realistic stage art. In the Robertson-Bancroft movement that yearning was at last given a partial fulfilment.

Once more English taste was satisfied: realism once again triumphed because it was still unreal. Its manifestations, however, were in all respects more sincere than any that had yet appeared on the English stage.

With this result, marked by the death of Robertson in 1871, our present study must close.

Among the conclusions to which it lends probability, the most important, perhaps, may thus be stated:

The English stage from 1800 to 1865, instead of being in the state of stagnation usually assumed, was vigorously in process of development. If there was an absence of a vital literary drama, there was an equally vigorous and unmistakable presence of a dramatic vitality in every other branch of stagecraft. It was the peculiar business of the age to adjust stage conditions for the reception of a new type of written drama. When those conditions were sufficiently adjusted, the new drama was forthcoming.

The period gains a very special literary interest because of the clash between the conservative tendencies of "legitimate" traditions and the new realistic principle which was applied chiefly in the vulgar and "illegitimate" forms of dramatic representation. Gradually this principle won approval for itself, and spread its influence to the interpretation, and then to the composition, of legitimate drama.

The dying out of the old and the progress of the new were gradual but continuous, and were conditioned directly and forcibly by the popular taste.

This taste, however, was itself subject to change by education, and was ready in 1860 to accept from Fechter what most certainly it would in 1837 have condemned in Macready.

Instead of the break that has often been supposed to exist between the Robertsonian school and all that had preceded it, we have observed a current of stage progress from the beginning to the end of our period. This "stream of life," as I have called it, was constant and in the main consistent with the unifying principle of realism. Directed by this principle, every department of stage activity gradually fell in line, but first and most notably, the arts of the scene-painter, the costumer, the manager, and the actor.

When viewed in its relationship to this stream of life, the Robertsonian school itself is seen to be merely the most complete and satisfying expression of the tendencies that had made themselves felt on the London stage. It was the glory of Robertson and the Bancrofts that they understood the new tendencies and directed them to their natural conclusions.

Robertson will never enjoy eminence because of literary quality considered apart from stage history. But in the light of that history, he becomes, I believe, one of the most interesting dramatic figures of England. He was the only man of literary ability who devoted himself exclusively and without stint or shame to the study of the stage and to the work of the playwright. He was one of a very small band of men who grasped the meaning of contemporary stage developments: he was the only one who knew how to make the most of them as a playwright.

Our study has further suggested that, on the stage, and quite apart from written drama, there is a constant stream of influence which is in itself consistent, continuous, and progressive. This living drama reacts upon a living audience, and the living audience upon the living drama. Thus during a period of seventy years we have seen by this interplay of life upon life the gradual creation of a mood or tendency of art which sought, and at last found, expression in a living dramatist. If in other periods of dramatic history such a phenomenon is not so clearly defined, it is nevertheless a safe assumption that *no study of the acted drama can be either accurate or complete which does not take into account "the stream of life on the stage," considered not as a vague colorless body of anecdote and gossip, but as a vital, commanding, and all-important literary influence.*

Appendices

APPENDIX I

LESSER THEATRES AND PLACES OF AMUSEMENT

THE Royalty Theatre in Wellclose Square was opened in 1789 by John Palmer, the first, the boldest, and the most unsuccessful of all who attempted to evade the monopoly laws. This East London theatre, although limited to "burlettas" and to what a writer in the *Inquisitor* calls an audience of "ultra-orientalists,"[1] seems to have made respectable progress, for we read that in 1815 it was "rising from obscurity."[2] Little more is recorded of it except its tragic end. In 1826 its walls, hastily constructed after a fire, collapsed under its new iron roof.

The Coburg, or Victoria, Theatre on Waterloo Road, built in 1818, long maintained the reputation of being the most debased of the transpontine houses. It was not without luxuries, however, for in 1820 it gloried in the absurdity of a looking-glass curtain. The *Inquisitor* flays it for its "miserable mummery," and Hazlitt, hoping to renew there his happy boyhood love of spectacle, found it "nothing but an exhibition of the most petulant cockneyism and vulgar slang." It had become a "Bridewell or a brothel" patronized by "Jew-boys, pickpockets, prostitutes, and mountebanks." The audience came "not to admire . . . but to vilify and degrade everything"; they "laughed, hooted, nick-named, and pelted [the actors] with oranges and witticisms, to show their unruly contempt for them and their art."[3] Although Junius Brutus Booth, and even Edmund Kean, at times resorted to this stage, Davidge, the proprietor, was content to supply his noisy patrons with entertainment to their taste. It is hardly surprising that Douglas Jerrold escaped from these torments at an early date.[4]

The distant Pavilion in Whitechapel Road created at the East End a reputation similar to that of the Coburg. We have little more to recall than its destruction by fire in 1856, its reconstruction, and its increase in size and equipment.

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[1] *Theat. Inquis.*, xiv, 20.

[2] *Ibid.*, Jan., 1815, p. 57.

[3] *London Magazine*, No. 3, March, 1820.

[4] See Appendix III, pp. 440 f.

The City Theatre in Milton Street (more familiar as Grub Street) lasted only during the financially disastrous years from 1829 to 1836. It was both respectable and unfortunate. Kean, Mrs. Stirling, Webster, Mrs. Waylett, at times appeared there. It was one of the principal victims of monopoly prosecutions. Moncrieff wrote for it and *Colleen Bawn*, under the original title *The Collegians*, adapted from Gerald Griffin's novel, was first given here, but without the Boucicault touch to make it a success. The house failed so completely that in 1836 it was demolished to make room for a warehouse.

In 1830 a theatre called the Garrick was erected in Goodman's Fields, near the site of Garrick's first London appearance. The *Theatrical Journal* regularly spoke of its productions as "domestic and nautical melodramas commencing at 6.30. Boxes 1*s*.; pit and gallery, 6*d*."

In Norton Folgate were two minors, the City of London and the Royal Standard. The New Standard was by far the largest of all the minor houses; its pit was actually larger than that of Drury Lane. In all it seated 2,200 people. It was opened to the public in 1845 and was destroyed in 1866.[1] A peculiarity of this house was its convertible stage, which might be turned into a complete horse-ring. For this purpose the boxes were removable.[2]

All the remaining theatres are for our purpose negligible. They were: the little Sans Souci (1792 to 1834) used by amateurs and French companies; the Argyll Rooms used under aristocratic patronage for exhibitions, concerts, and French companies; the Marylebone at the extreme west of London, where Mrs. Warner and J. W. Wallack tried to repeat the Islington successes of Samuel Phelps, but without success; the Orange Street Theatre, built in Chelsea in 1831, but used only one year; the Albion and Westminster, both built in 1832, but abandoned within five years; the Globe, or Rotunda, on Blackfriars Road, built in 1833, and the Royal Kent, in 1834, neither of which survived much longer.

Many halls and theatres were used almost exclusively by amateur theatrical societies, which after 1840 were notably active. The *Theatrical Journal*, which professed to be the official organ for these societies, regularly listed their places of performance. In 1865 the following were included: the Bower, Westminster Road; the Cabinet, Liverpool Street; the Eclectic Hall, Denmark Street, Soho; Bass's Vauxhall; Lincoln's Hall, Portland Street, the Institution of London Mechanics, Chancery Lane; the Manchester, Edward Street; and as if these were not enough to supply the popular demand, the *Journal* announces "amateur portable theatres."

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[1] Baker dates the Standard 1837 to 1867. The *Theat. Jour.* of Jan. 25, 1845, describes the opening of The New Standard that replaced the earlier house, and that of Oct. 24, 1866, tells of its destruction.

[2] *Ibid.*, Jan. 25, 1845.

In addition to these there was the New Royalty Theatre, more generally known as the Soho, which appears to have been the principal amateur house. It was constructed in 1840 by Miss Kelley, in whose company Boucicault, then known as Lee Moreton, acted for a time. A clumsy machine for hoisting scenery was installed, but because of its noise, it served only to hasten the failure of this theatre as a commercial enterprise. It was thus made available for amateurs, and soon became the centre of the very great amateur activity which so vital a publication as the *Theatrical Journal* shows to have existed. Of all the amateur performances, those at the Soho were most frequently reported in this periodical. This amateur effort, besides increasing the general interest in the drama and developing a few talented performers for the professional stages, seems to have made little appreciable contribution to dramatic art. It was content to reflect, with no apparent effort to reform.

The spell of depression that prevented theatre construction after 1841 was not broken until 1866, in which year Sefton Parry built the Holborn Theatre. The Queen's, or the National, in Longacre, dating from 1867, was for a time hospitable to Charles Reade and Tom Taylor. Then followed in quick succession the Globe, the Gaiety, the Charing Cross, the Opera Comique, the Vaudeville, the New Chelsea, and the Philharmonic. This rapid construction was an unmistakable proof of the beginnings of a new dramatic prosperity, to be even more richly productive in the following decades. Unlike the artificially induced speculation from 1829 to 1841, this outburst of building in 1866 was spontaneous and natural, and for the most part attended with financial success.

To make our inspection complete we must glance at the favorite out-door theatres, which furnished not a little respectable theatrical entertainment to England's pleasure-loving public. Vauxhall, the oldest, is too familiar to students of literature to need comment. Although theatricals were occasionally presented here, the garden was chiefly famous for fireworks, music, and masquerades. More nearly like theatres were the Eagle or Grecian, the Royal Albert, the Britannia, the Alexandra, and the Bower. Of these the Eagle and the Royal Albert were by far the most celebrated for dramatic entertainment. The Eagle in Shepherdess Walk was built by "Bravo" Rouse in 1832, and was apparently the first place of the kind to give theatrical performances, with the possible exception of Vauxhall and the original Sadler's Wells gardens. After the freeing of the theatres Rouse gave regular performances of opera and the legitimate drama. His performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is said by Clement Scott to have been highly praiseworthy. He even aspired to tragedy. At this theatre Robson, the most celebrated of burlesque actors, and Sims Reeves, an almost equally famous singer, made their first appearances. The only distinguishing novelty of the Royal Albert, also in Shepherdess Walk, was a stage provided with two prosceniums: one gave on to the garden for performances in fair weather; the other opened into a covered hall for rainy days. It aspired to "legitimate" honors with such plays as *Henry IV*, *The Tower of Nesle*, and *The King's Fool*.

Another form of entertainment that influenced more or less directly the art of the stage, and one that I have not seen mentioned in this connection, was the exhibition of scenic illusion that was popular in London, especially during the early decades of the century. There were various kinds of exhibits known as panoramas, cosmoramas, and dioramas. The verisimilitude of some of these is amply attested. The most admired was probably Baker's Panorama. At one time he maintained two houses, one in the Strand and one in Leicester Square. Later, he exhibited his scenes in Regent's Park. Britton's *Picture of London* in 1826 describes them as "the triumph of aerial and linear perspective." Baker's arrangements consisted of "two circles, an upper and a lower, in which are constantly exhibited views of great cities, battles, etc. The illusion is so complete that the spectator may imagine that he is present at the actual display of the objects represented."[1]

More directly influential, so far as stage scenery was concerned, was the diorama, which was a mechanical appliance for moving the painted canvas to give the effect of passing scenes and events. Stanfield, whose dioramas were the most celebrated, contributed, as Macready's scene-painter, most of the best scenes in that actor-manager's revivals. A writer in the *Quarterly Review* praised them as "the exquisite perspectives or constantly shifting views of Stanfield."[2]

The diorama made its first appearance on the stage before 1824, for in that year Drury Lane sold its diorama machinery to a French manager.[3] Macready made use of one as a setting for the choruses of *Henry V*.[4] The effectiveness of this device as utilized in 1826 is attested by Pückler-Muskau, who was apparently more impressed by the development of scenic art than by anything else he saw in London theatres. Of the Kensington Gardens diorama he wrote: "It far surpassed my expectations, and all that I formerly had seen of the same kind. It is certainly impossible to deceive the senses more effectually; even with the certitude of illusion one can hardly persuade oneself it does not exist."[5]

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[1] Britton, *Picture of London*, p. 317.

[2] *Quarterly Review*, lxvi, 514.

[3] *Theat. Obs.*, Jan. 1, 1824.

[4] Macready's *Diaries*, June 10, 1839, note.

[5] Pückler-Muskau, *Tour of a German Prince*, Letter 7, Dec. 23, 1826.

APPENDIX II

AUTHORS' FINANCIAL DISABILITIES

As early as 1830 a Dramatic Authors' Society was formed, in which Bulwer-Lytton, Serle, Planché, and Douglas Jerrold were prominent figures. A pamphlet by T. J. Thackeray, entitled *Rights of Dramatic Authors*, appeared in 1832 in connection with the larger movement for the freedom of the theatres. This gave with minute detail the great advantages enjoyed by dramatists in France and Belgium because of legal protection against grasping managers.

Startling as it may seem, conditions prevailed in London during most of our period similar to those which prevented Shakespeare from publishing his plays. There was no such thing as acting rights. The only hold an author had on his property was in the original bargain with the manager who purchased the manuscript. Generally this agreement specified, besides the purchase price, a bonus after a stated number of performances; but this was rarely large, and extended, as a rule, no further than the ninth performance. In any event, it was highly desirable for an author's play to be staged at once, but there was no guaranty to this effect. Thackeray thus described the injustices confronting the practical dramatist:

> In the bargains made between managers and authors, there is this singular feature, unknown to every other specimen of traffic, namely, that one of the parties is bound, while the other is free. The author sells his property upon a condition which the manager may or may not fulfil, according to his will and pleasure, and upon such terms alone the authors' profits almost depend.

He showed further that in France an author was entitled by law to a twenty-first part of the gross receipts of his piece, on every night of its performance in every theatre of France, during his lifetime, and even for the benefit of his heirs for ten years after his decease. Such a law in England would have created Utopian conditions for Douglas Jerrold, for instance, who was frank to acknowledge that in spite of his success he could never have supported himself from the returns of his dramas. His *Black-eyed Susan* made the fortunes of managers all over England, but Jerrold himself received only the seventy pounds that Elliston paid him for the manuscript. Moncrieff's *Tom and Jerry*, which netted the managers of the Adelphi alone upwards of £25,000, caused the author actual loss, because the theatre cheated him out of the promised annuity, although he had lived up to his agreement which made it impossible for him to accept a Drury Lane engagement or even to publish the play itself.[1]

On the monopoly stages at the beginning of the century authors were treated much better. Cumberland, for instance, had made an agreement with both Sheridan and Harris, whereby he was to receive £500 for the first nine nights of any play and, in addition, £100 on the twentieth night and £100 more on the fortieth. Similarly, Colman had received for *John Bull* £1,200.[2] By 1832, however, no manager could have afforded such a price for any play. It was then stipulated, as a rule, that for a five-act piece £100 should be paid the author on the third night, £100 on the sixth, £100 on the ninth. If the play ran for forty nights, the author at the end of that time received another sum of £100. Almost no five-act play enjoyed so much success. If a new play reached the ninth evening, it was considered lucky. Accordingly £200 was all that an author might expect from a serious piece of writing under ordinarily favorable conditions. A fee of £400 was a phenomenal return. So far as I have been able to ascertain, £400 paid to Poole for *Paul Pry* and £400 paid by Phelps to the Reverend Mr. White for *John Saville of Haystead*, were the largest prices paid in England for any new play between 1810 and 1860. This sum was greatly in excess of what authors of equally popular pieces usually received.

The first step to amend the discouraging situation was taken by J. R. Planché. His *Charles XII* was pirated in Edinburgh, whereupon he set on foot a movement which resulted in the Authors' Act of 1833.[3] By this law, for the first time in English history, acting rights were secured to authors. The provisions of the law were that no play or part of a play might be given in the kingdom without an author's consent. A penalty of not less than forty shillings was fixed, or an action for damages, with double costs of suit, was allowed. The effect of this beneficial measure was greatly lessened, however, by a later court ruling transferring the acting rights to the publisher of the play, and by the suppression of the "double costs" clause. After this action nothing more was accomplished legally before 1860.

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[1] See the introductory remarks to the first edition of *Tom and Jerry*.

[2] See Peake's *Colman Family*.

[3] *Recollections and Reflections* of J. R. Planché, i, 147 ff.

A kind of authors' union had been previously formed, however, meeting first at Garrick's Head in Bow Street. In this manner they established an unwritten and often violated law providing for the following royalties: For a five-act tragedy or comedy, ten pounds a night; for a two-act piece, seven pounds; and for a one-act interlude, five pounds. Although this society afforded some protection and relief, most unfavorable conditions continued until the advent of the Boucicault management in 1860. Naturally there had been constant friction between managers and authors, and also between managers and the society. When, for instance, Charles Kean delayed the production of Jerrold's *Heart of Gold*, this testy author attempted to make war upon Kean. His attack seems to have reflected more credit upon Kean than upon his accuser.

The Authors' Act had, indeed, left undone practically all that authors most needed for their protection. No obligation was imposed upon managers to produce plays they had purchased, and even the author's rights had been transferred to his publisher. Another class of writers, the novelists, had no protection whatever against stage pirating after the novel in its original form was published. Charles Reade was in this manner cheated out of the returns from the staging of *It is Never Too Late to Mend.* It happened, however, that Reade had written an early play called *Gold*, which anticipated the story of the later novel. On the basis of this dramatization, he won the important decision that, if a novelist had dramatized his book, no matter how crudely, his rights were secure.

APPENDIX III

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

BESIDES the works mentioned in my preface, many others bear acutely upon aspects of the early-nineteenth-century stage. A valuable contribution was Professor Watson Nicholson's *The Struggle for a Free Stage*, in which the legal problems involved are elucidated. Although I have to take exception to some of the writer's conclusions, I am indebted to him for much information and for the coördination of confusing facts. His conclusions, which follow very naturally from the premises upon which he proceeds, illustrate interestingly the difficulty of understanding the relation of any one fact in the theatrical history of this period without an extended knowledge of the rest. For example, he concludes, after tracing the rise of the monopoly, its legal vagaries, its weakening, and its final overthrow: "The law [the Theatre Regulation Bill of 1843, abolishing the monopoly] caused no alteration whatever in theatrical conditions [except that] it put to rest the interminable quarrels of the majors and minors, and wiped out the blot of theatrical monopoly." At the end of my chapter on this topic I have shown that this statement does not fairly represent the effect of this law on the progress of dramatic history; for whether we regard abolition of the monopoly as a gradual development or as the effect of a single enactment, certain it is that benefits of great importance to the progress of drama resulted. I have shown also, I think, that the monopoly was actually effective to a considerable extent until the passing of the enactment.

Of the standard books on the general field, we may single out Clement Scott's *The Drama of Yesterday*, John Coleman's *Players and Playwrights I Have Known*, and Alfred Darbyshire's *The Art of the Victorian Stage*, as perhaps the best-known and most authoritative works of their type. Although they contain a wealth of valuable first-hand material, they lack perspective and completeness. The fact that these writers were eyewitnesses of much that they describe predisposed them to partiality and a lack of proportion in dealing with matters with which they were less familiar. Scott, for instance, overemphasizes the Robertsonian movement by a somewhat superficial and depreciatory treatment of earlier managements. Coleman, although more appreciative of the earlier days, is inclined to exaggerate. Neither goes far beyond his own recollections, and these become hazy in the treatment of events before 1850. Darbyshire, with a broader outlook, presents a limited amount of information.

When more serious and scholarly attempts have been made to investigate the period, the workers have in general contented themselves with chronicling a carefully selected series of facts without considering the interrelationship of these facts. Such, for instance, are Archer's early contribution on the subject in Ward's *Reign of Victoria*, Fitzgerald's treatment of the period in his *History of the Stage*, and the more widely familiar *History of the London Stage* by Barton Baker.

By far the most dependable contributions on the general field have, of course, been made by William Archer. It is to be regretted that he has not set himself the task of compiling a complete history of the stage and drama of this period, for no one else has at his command both the information and the results of personal observation and experience to make such a work of lasting value. My only further regret with regard to his writings on our subject is that they slight what in my opinion is the great contribution made to the progress of drama by the minor stages. In his treatment of the field in his admirable *The Old Drama and the New*, he neglects this contribution almost altogether. Baker, while more detailed, is confusing in his method of presentation, especially to the student of literature. His grouping of the theatres, which is his only principle of arrangement, is made without any reference to their nature as houses or to their influence in the progress of drama. His book is an unworked mine of detailed information, of great value, but marred by mere gossip and slight inaccuracies. Fitzgerald's history slights the period as far as it ventures upon it.

Two other well-known works remain to be considered, Joseph Knight's *History of the Stage During the Victorian Era*[1] and Augustin Filon's *Le Théâtre Anglais,*[1] both of which are brilliant and readable, and stand almost alone among the works mentioned in their attempt to coördinate and appraise the facts with which they deal in their relation to general dramatic history. While I hesitate to combat the authority of one so familiar with the English stage as Joseph Knight, I must at least question the completeness and value of a work which professes to deal with the Victorian drama, but which, after disposing in a few words of contempt of such producers as Kean, Macready, and Phelps, proceeds with the statement: "The year 1865 accordingly, a period practically a generation ago, may be regarded as that of the birth of the stage of to-day." Furthermore, this statement is not strictly true, as I think sufficiently proved by the facts presented in my chapters on the pre-Robertsonian drama.

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[1] Published in a limited edition, together with a review of *The Stage in the Year 1900;* compiled by Eden Hooper.

A work that has attracted much attention in its day, both in England and on the Continent, is Filon's *Le Théâtre Anglais*, which reviews, and in general condemns, the dramatic entertainers of our period with an assurance that is hardly warranted by his superficial acquaintance with the bare facts with which he deals. He has undoubtedly been responsible for no small amount of the false impressions about the Victorian stage, a result the more to be deplored because of the many admirable and valid contributions he has made to our understanding of the period. Like many others Filon overestimates the Robertsonian initiative by neglecting the influences that made it possible. In this respect he clearly echoes Clement Scott. What he has to say of earlier periods is misleading, if not wholly incorrect. So well does his treatment illustrate the dangers of historical and critical study in this period, especially when based upon an insufficient knowledge of the facts, that I must delay a moment to cite glaring instances. Filon tells us that from 1820 to 1830 the theatres "prospered to all appearances exceedingly." The reverse was actually their unhappy lot. Even Elliston failed in 1826, and then ensued the most disastrous financial depression during the whole period. Filon also asserts that in these years "neither in this monotonous and easy-going phase of life, nor in the theatrical world of London, had any one any idea of modifying the forms or tendencies of the stage."[1] On the contrary, there were many with such ideas, and valid ideas, too. At that very time, Macready, Vestris, the younger Charles Mathews, Planché, and Douglas Jerrold were actually making innovations which in their day were regarded as revolutionary, and which are forgotten in ours merely because they have become the commonplaces of the modern stage.

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[1] Available in an English translation as *The English Stage* (1897).

Filon's comment on Douglas Jerrold shows perhaps even more glaringly his misconception of the dramatic conditions of which he so authoritatively writes. "Jerrold," he tells us, "had to follow the public taste which led him so terribly astray. His greatest success was his worst production — *Black-eyed Susan*, the popularity of which does not seem to have been even yet exhausted. . . . It is more difficult to understand how Jerrold, who had some regard for realism, and who had himself served upon the sea, could have brought himself to write a drama which had in it not a semblance of truth, nor a touch of nature."[2] This criticism clearly implies that Jerrold, in writing *Black-eyed Susan*, was deliberately lowering his standards set in earlier and more meritorious work, and was thus yielding to popular taste. *Black-eyed Susan*, on the contrary, was among Jerrold's earliest works, appearing in 1829. Not until 1844, in the *Prisoner of War*, did Jerrold's more meritorious work find a place on the stage. Whatever the state of popular taste, it is certain, that Jerrold followed a policy exactly the reverse of that implied by Filon.

Besides committing this obvious error, Filon falls into the more serious one of completely overlooking the monopoly conditions that had forced Jerrold at the very outset of his career to write such plays as *Black-eyed Susan* or nothing at all. The fact is that Jerrold wrote the play in question for the only kind of theatre where a young, unknown author could find a hearing. At the time he was employed as hack-writer in Davidge's theatre, called the Coburg, where the law allowed only such plays as *Black-eyed Susan* to be performed. Incidentally, the house at this time was the worst of the sort in London. A play on this stage would ordinarily be unknown to the better class of playgoers. Only because the high-spirited Jerrold broke with his task-master Davidge, did the play win the extraordinary popularity it has enjoyed to within a few decades. The enterprising Elliston put it on at his Surrey Theatre, a house of a similar but more refined character. Its immediate and almost epoch-making success was due, not to the fact, as Filon states, that it was without "one touch of nature," but precisely because there was far more of nature in it than had previously been seen in the "illegitimate" drama.

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[1] *The English Stage*, p. 49.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

For similar reasons Jerrold's *The Rent Day* was cast in practically the same form. Given a chance to write for the majors, he must first show his metal in an after-piece, and an after-piece at this time was generally some type of the "illegitimate drama." Only after the success of *The Rent Day* did Jerrold have a chance to display more meritorious talents. Following the establishment of free theatres, several of his pretentious comedies, like *A Prisoner of War*, *Bubbles of the Day*, and *Time Works Wonders*, received a respectful and even an enthusiastic hearing. If these plays did not vie in popularity with *Black-eyed Susan*, his most sympathetic critics are now, I believe, willing to admit that the fault was as much Jerrold's as it was that of his London audiences. A technique adequate for melodrama did not make him a master of comedy as well. It is utterly misleading to state as Filon does, that, in writing *Black-eyed Susan*, Jerrold was led "terribly astray."

I have cited these errors at considerable length, not to discredit Filon, but to point out the dangers to which anyone approaching this field of dramatic history is liable, even in dealing with well-known personages like Jerrold.

So widely has Filon's readable and convenient little book been circulated among those who have sought to know the values of this period, that I must point out other important weaknesses. He seems to have had no just appreciation of the work done in the development of the minor or "illegitimate" theatres, and of the dramatic art connected with them. Thus he declares that, when Macready relinquished his management in 1843, the stage "was in a state of squalor difficult to describe." From that date until 1865 he finds little or nothing to brighten the gloom. Granting that this statement might be true if applied only to the great theatres, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, which after 1843 became all but extinct as homes of the spoken drama, I must insist that the impression given is not at all true of the minor houses, which became more sumptuous and far better equipped than they had ever been before. Within seven years the Princess's Theatre had far outdistanced even the greatest of previous managerial efforts. Besides, there was Phelps at Sadler's Wells, Vestris and Mathews at the Lyceum, and at the Haymarket, Benjamin Webster at the height of his fame as actor and manager. Still more glaring is Filon's ignorance of the minor stages when he declares that the rage for burlesque "dates from almost the same moment as the introduction of the Boucicault Drama," by which he manifestly means not the *London Assurance* type of the forties but the *Colleen Bawn* or "sensation" variety, popular after 1860. The simple and undisputed fact is that the rage for burlesque started long before the nineteenth century. It may perhaps be said to have reached an acute stage of popularity under Vestris at the Olympic in 1831. Under the same manageress it was still passionately enjoyed at the Lyceum for many years after 1847, and, indeed, it was to fill the place vacated by Vestris that the Swanborough management at the Strand, to which Filon has reference, came into existence.

Besides this failure to grasp the relationship of events, Filon is strangely unsympathetic and unfair in his treatment of many of the great dramatic figures of the period. It is well known that Macready was given to mannerisms that might cause us unintended amusement to-day. It is not just to that venerable actor, however, flippantly to dismiss his work with the observation that "his endowments might have made the fortunes of a clown." More unjust still is Filon's neglect of the management of Charles Kean. Speaking of the period from 1850 to 1860, he asserts that, aside from the Bateman children and G. V. Brooke, no manifestations of the legitimate drama were to be found except at Sadler's Wells in Islington.[1] At this very time, as everyone knows, the management of Charles Kean at the Princess's brought the legitimate stage to the highest pitch of respectability, and placed upon it what at that time were unparalleled examples of artistic settings for the poetic drama. In spite of this obvious truth, Filon asserts that "the art of *mise-en-scène* did not exist."[2]

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[1] *The English Stage*, p. 156.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 307.

Of the contemporary criticism of the stage I have investigated no small amount. Besides immensely valuable and well-known work of such writers as Hunt, Hazlitt, Lamb, Forster, and Lewes,[1] I have consulted a large field of journalistic comment with a point of view considerably nearer that of the average playgoer. Four valuable periodicals of dramatic interest serve as a convenient nucleus for our study: the *Theatrical Inquisitor*, the *Theatrical Observer*, the *Era*, and the *Theatrical Journal*. Through these the progress of stage events may be followed continuously from 1812 to 1870. Many other papers professing special dramatic interest flourished for short periods, but these four periodicals seemed to enjoy a great popular success and continued, in spite of all opposition, to serve the public as dramatic mirrors through long periods of time.

The *Theatrical Inquisitor* from 1812 to 1821 presents a monthly review of all theatrical happenings, "minor" as well as "major," and contains much discussion and correspondence as well as criticism of important performances. Beginning in 1820, the *Theatrical Observer*, an unpretentious but apparently impartial sheet, was published every night through the remainder of our period. It contains the bills of the major houses until 1843, and later the announcements of performances at the more representative theatres. In addition, it contains a wealth of discussion and intimate observation upon theatrical affairs. It was sold each evening to the theatregoers, giving them a bill of the evening's performance on one page, with a criticism of the performance of the night before on the other. It may be assumed, therefore, that the *Observer* represents very closely the popular point of view with regard to theatrical events, and for that reason it is especially valuable in such a study as the present.

The *Theatrical Journal* appeared first in 1837 and continued beyond the end of our period. It was published weekly and represented the point of view of theatrical amateurs, of whom there were in London a considerable number of flourishing societies during these years. It professed not only to describe and criticize all the plays given at the London theatres, but also to discuss the trend of theatrical events in editorials and correspondence that seem fairly to present all sides of dramatic problems as they arose. It boasted a circulation of 10,000 subscribers, including the Queen and the Royal Consort, who, the editor declared, had the *Journal* laid regularly on their coffee table.

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[1] The most valuable of their comments have been edited by Archer and Lowe.

The dramatic interest of the *Era* is better known.

Taken as a whole, and with due allowance for prejudice and favor, these journals furnish a fairly reliable chronicle of dramatic facts and, I believe, a less prejudiced account of stage events than is to be found in similar papers of the present day. It is fair to say of the older papers that they help us to learn what the public of those days thought of the stage, rather than what the stage thought of itself.

General newspaper comment for our period is in the main less to be trusted. Editors did not care to assume the responsibility for their critic's utterances if these brought on a quarrel. Even men like Oxenford of the *Times* frankly admitted such restraint. The *Era*, which professed especially to treat topics of the stage, admittedly espoused the interests of the dramatic profession. Where I have used material from the papers, I have been careful to see that it accords with other reliable information. As early as 1815 the *Inquisitor* took delight in presenting conflicting critical opinions from the daily press, from which it is clear that little reliance can be placed on such reviews.[1]

A still greater amount of material is available in the form of pamphlets, views of the stage, memoirs of actors, playwrights, and managers, prefaces to editions of the acted drama, collections of play-bills, journals of playgoers, and diaries of men closely connected with the stage. While much of this is chatty, uncritical, prejudiced, and insignificant, much also is of great value. For instance, Henry Morley's *Journal of a London Playgoer* presents with the sympathetic appreciation of a contemporary whose critical opinion is still valuable, much comment that ought to dispel the contempt which many have recently heaped upon the dramatic art from 1850 to 1866. Again, in such books as Westland Marston's *Our Recent Actors* we have not only the opinions of an enthusiast but those

[1] The *Theat. Inquis.*, viii, 106 and 266.

of one who labored devotedly for the uplift of the drama, and one who seems to have been thoroughly alive to the many complex tendencies of his day.

I have consulted with an attempt at thoroughness a large amount of *theatricalia*, including the great collections at the British Museum, and the admirable Lowe, Shaw, and Wendell collections at the Harvard Library. I know of no safeguards against mistakes in dealing with the vagaries of theatrical life. I have tried to avoid all matter of a clearly prejudiced nature, such as Jerrold's attacks upon Charles Kean, although I have included material on this same actor from Lewes, who also bore him a grudge, when it seems to accord with my impression derived from other sources. This I have done only because of the bigness of Lewes's critical attitude and the value of his opinions. So far as I know, I have made use of no information which is not substantiated by my general reading and by other direct testimony. Whatever mistakes I have made in detail I hope are not of a nature to render my general conclusions unsound. In most cases, at least, I have cited my evidence, and wherever I have erred in judgment, I have provided, I believe, every means for the detection of my mistakes.

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